

THE CASE OF THE COUNTERFEIT CONSUL  
A Detective Story after Erle Stanley Gardner

by  
ED FERRIS

I.

The sun set over the Pacific, painting Los Angeles orange-red then adding long, narrow shadows in the /film noir/ style. Earl Carson, the successful trial lawyer, and Adele Hall, his secretary and companion, watched the familiar but entrancing scene from the spacious picture window of the Crowncrest Tavern, set high on the ridge above the city.

As the lights came on in the houses and along the streets below, he set down his glass of Chianti and commented: "You know, all this new construction has one drawback."

"Only one?" Adele teased.

"Well, the increase in population does bring with it several problems," the lawyer began, recalling his recent speech on the subject to the Rotary Club of Cucamonga. "Take, for example, the effect on ..." he continued, but broke off when he noticed Adele's solemn expression contrasting with the twinkle in her eye. "Or don't take the effect if you don't want to," he said. "Take it or leave it, baggage. What I mean is that there's only one drawback you can see from up here."

She gave him a grin.

"All this new construction fills in the spaces along the trolley lines," he continued. "You can't tell Hollywood from Burbank anymore."

"You can when you're down there," she observed. "Pretty hard to mistake a Hollywood crowd."

"It's just a few people who stand out," he asserted. "Plenty of solid citizens in the background, people who are getting a pimento-cheese sandwich and cup of coffee on their lunch break. People who get up in the morning, kiss the wife, and hurry off to work," he continued, a little doubtfully.

"That doesn't sound like Hollywood and Vine to me," Adele differed. "You can't get a seat at any lunch counter because they're filled by aspiring actresses hoping to get noticed by a director or agent out on his lunch break. The sidewalks are full of studio cowboys slouching around for the same reason and balding Jew fixers making deals or pretending to. Very little room for your honest citizen in a hurry. And you know you can't get anyplace driving in that neighborhood."

"You're exaggerating," Earl claimed. "I myself have actually driven thorough and beyond that intersection. During wartime, of course."

That cut down the traffic some, although all those movie people seemed to get priority gasoline cards."

"Phonies," she observed. "The cards, I mean. You put some of those counterfeiters in jail, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did," he replied, "and it was the best thing I did for the war effort even counting my time in Germany. But it used to be you'd drive from Pasadena into Hollywood and get the sense of going from one town to another. Cross the Arroyo and there were hardly any houses in between. When Joe opened this place, way back then, you'd look out this window at night and see bands of darkness between Culver City and Hollywood and Burbank and Pasadena, with just one line of streetlamps from one to the other. Now you've got houses and side streets all lit up. Pretty soon it'll just be one big city, to look at at least."

They considered this sobering prospect while finishing the Chianti.

"More business for the firm," Adele suggested. "More accidents, more injury cases, more settlements with thirty percent plus for Earl Carson, Attorney at Law."

He gestured his dissent while putting down his glass with the other hand. "I don't like injury cases. I take the ones that have some moral significance. Where somebody needs help," he explained. "Where the other side is trying to pettifog somebody out of his or her rightful compensation. You know I turn most of them down. Criminal cases are really my specialty."

"And that side of the business should increase, too," his secretary countered. "More population, more criminals, more crime. We're in clover no matter how you look at it!"

"Great," the lawyer grimaced. He refilled her glass and they sipped the wine in silence, looking at the tracery of lights below.

"Same houses, same streets, same people," he resumed. "Well, most of the people. You have to go up to Pasadena to get a different style of residence."

"And residents," Adele agreed. "Filthy rich."

"There are poor people in Pasadena," he asserted, even more doubtfully. "There have to be. Who sweeps the confetti out of the Rose Bowl?"

"Braceros," she answered. "It's one of those choice towns where you can't afford to live if you work for your living."

"You're exaggerating," he claimed again.

She shrugged.

He continued. "But except for enclaves like Pasadena and Beverly

Hills all of the towns are the same and always have been. That's because they were settled at the same time and by the same people."

"You mean from Iowa in the 1920's?" she suggested.

"Well, no, I was thinking of forty years earlier, but you're right about the Twenties and now about the Forties. Whatever character the old Spanish towns had is submerged in the ocean of immigrants."

"The old hacienda of Burbanko," she suggested.

"Ciudad de Culvero. Challiwood," he contributed.

"So that's why Trent and the D.A. never know what's going on. They're over their heads in the ocean of immigrants," she said.

He considered this. "True, in most cities the authorities know the crooks," he allowed. "You don't have this constant influx of the criminal classes along with the others. But that also means that the cops have to get out and investigate. They have to find out about the victim and his associates and his business. None of this 'usual suspects' stuff. You have to keep an open mind to make sense of this town," he declared.

"So that's why they don't show any evidence of brains. Their minds are so open all the contents fell out long ago," Adele asserted.

He raised his eyebrows and rolled his eyes.

"Anyway," she continued, "it's impossible to make sense of Hollywood."

He admitted this.

"And all the other places are full of the same kinds of people, as you were telling me just a few minutes ago, so you can figure /them/ out just as easy as any other people from Iowa," she claimed.

"Exactly," he said, seriously. "The main source of conflict here, as in Iowa, is the neighbor's cows getting into your cornfield."

They both laughed. "OK, you win," Adele conceded. "The towns all run together nowadays. Good thing, too. You ever spend any time in the San Fernando twenty years ago?"

"Twenty?" quizzed the lawyer, with a sly look. "What would you know about twenty years ago?"

"I was around then," Adele asserted, blushing.

"A schoolgirl in pigtails," he countered.

"Right. With skinny knees all scratched up from falling off my bicycle," she continued. "I got sent up to Aunt Clara's, just this side of

Newhall. God, what a hole. Dusty, hot, nothing at all to do. You didn't dare go to the picture show, young lady, without a chaperon. Which Aunt Clara was too busy to do."

"Busy doing what?" he asked, sympathetically.

"Drinking beer on the back porch and fanning herself," she replied.  
"That's all I ever saw her doing. But I wasn't an unbiased witness."

"Move to strike," he countered.

"Denied," Adele said with judicial pomposity. "The jury will evaluate the testimony and give it the weight it deserves."

"Happens in all my cases," the lawyer complained. "What I want to get in gets stricken and what I don't want stays. Hell of a place to practice law in."

"You do all right," Adele pointed out.

"Well, yes, if I do say so myself ... " he began, but was interrupted.

"Everything A-OK? Was good?" asked Joe Padena, the restaurant owner, smiling at Miss Hall and resting his arm familiarly on the lawyer's shoulder.

"Beautiful, Joe," Adele said, affectionately.

"Gets better every time, Joe," agreed Carson. "It's a wonder you let us stay here, rubbernecking out the window for hours on end."

"Stay all you like! What, you think I'll run off my two best customers? What is the window for, anyway, huh? Look out all you like! Here, have another bottle Chianti. On the house!"

"No, no," Earl protested. "I have to drive home. More /vino/ and I'll have to go back through Pomona." The direct route down the ridge was steep and twisting; going South along the ridge was safer but some twenty miles out of the way. However, Carson had noticed the line of couples waiting for tables and knew he should turn down Joe's offer if only for Joe's business' sake. "Let's hook 'em up and move 'em out, Adele," he told her. He drew back her chair as she rose.

A signal from a waitress caught Joe's attention. "On the account, Mr. Carson?" he asked hurriedly. "Right," Carson agreed, and the restaurateur bustled off.

The couple took their time strolling across the graveled parking lot to Carson's brick-red Lincoln Zephyr. A hint of sagebrush wafted on the breeze, which was deliciously cool in contrast to the lingering warmth of the day. As he opened the car door for Adele, she gracefully turned, gathered him in her free arm, and kissed him. After a while, they broke apart and she seated herself in the car. Another couple passed

in front of the car. The woman gave Earl and Adele a good-natured wink.

After they passed, Carson turned the key but stopped with his finger extended to push the starter button. "They won't get in," he said, worried.

"Why, you're right. I almost didn't notice that," Adele agreed. "Joe doesn't let Negroes in his place."

"Might be trouble," said the lawyer, and, taking the key out of the ignition, pulled the door open. "Stay here a minute," he told her. She nodded.

He got out of the car and walked forward after the black couple. The woman looked back, saw him, and nudged her escort. They turned and came back to where Carson was standing.

"Hippolyte Christophe," the man introduced himself, "and my wife, Virginie." He paused. Carson held out his hand and the black man, relieved, shook it. "Are you familiar with this /estaminet/?" he asked.

"Earl Carson," the lawyer replied. "And my secretary and close friend, Adele Hall," he added, gesturing to the car. Adele waved at them through the windshield. "I am very familiar with this restaurant," he said, emphasizing the noun. "My French is not good, but I think you're mistaken in -- in what you called it."

"Tavern?" queried M. Christophe.

"Not really," Earl said, taking in his meaning. "You can get drinks there, but they serve meals as their only business. They don't have rooms."

Puzzled, the man knit his dark brows. "We cannot be accommodated -- overnight?" he asked, evidently searching for words.

"No," Carson said, severely. "Are you traveling?"

"Yes," M. Christophe replied. "We applied at several hotels and were turned away. The porter at the Wilshire Hotel suggested we go here. A long distance."

That made sense to the lawyer only because he had been retained by Joe Padena in the litigation arising out of a fight between the emotional Italian and an employee of that Hotel, perhaps the self-same porter. Trying to stir up trouble, he thought, and not too scrupulous about who gets involved in it. "He was mistaken," Carson finally said. "You won't be able to get a room at most hotels in this city. It's segregated, not by law, but we have certain hotels for those of color."

"Ah. Inferior ones."

Surprised, Carson replied: "No, not at all. There are inferior ones, just as there are some lousy dives for white folks. But you can find clean rooms at a moderate price if you go to the right place."

"Lousy dives?" queried the stranger. "What ... where is the right place?"

"I'll have to ask around," the lawyer conceded. "I know some black folks here and they'll know where you can stay."

"But can you recommend this as a restaurant?" asked M. Christophe, gesturing to the Tavern.

"No," Carson said. "You would do better to dine at your hotel, when we find you one."

"Ah. The segregation."

"Well, yes."

"Let us proceed then to find the appropriate hotel. Will you lead us?"

"Sure," Carson said, thinking that there was something wrong about M. Christophe's dialect. Not exactly French turned into English words. But then perhaps he wasn't a Frenchman of France, as they say. He returned to his car as the black couple walked back to theirs.

Adele looked a question at him. "They're Monsieur Hippolyte Christophe and his lawfully wedded wife, Virginie," he explained as he started the car. "They thought the Crowncrest was a Tavern on the English model, with rooms to rent and a cozy private bar with a dartboard. I set them straight and somehow am now obligated to look up our client in that Consolidated Vultee employment dispute and see if he can steer them to a colored hotel. Are they following?" he asked as he slowly made for the lot exit.

"Yes," Adele replied. "They have a 1936 Ford coupe with every chrome accessory known to man."

"What color?"

"Black. No, navy blue," she corrected as the other car drove under a light standard.

"Raccoon tail on the radiator cap?"

She gazed back intently. "No, can't see one. Are you taking them down the shortcut?"

"Sure am. I have to assume they know how to drive and I sure don't want to spend the time on the scenic route. All the colored hotels are in West L.A., too, not out in Orange County."

"You know what those Ford brakes are like," she demurred.

"OK, I'll go slow. They still behind us?"

"Right. They've got six lights on. Those must be driving lights."

"That's what they're called. What they do is reflect off the guy in front of you's rear-view mirror so he can't see a damn thing behind him."

"Grouch," she playfully reprimanded him. She turned back, sitting sideways and glancing occasionally at the following car. Carson drove down the twisting grade, slowing at the curves and never exceeding twenty miles per hour.

"They're sure giving you enough room," she commented.

"Good thing, too."

"In fact, they haven't come round that curve yet."

"Come off it." He swung the car into the following, opposite curve.

"Take a look now. You have to see them."

"But I don't. There's nobody back there! Nobody at all!"

He tapped the brakes as the curve straightened. The car crawled along.

"See them now?" he asked.

"No. No lights at all. Nobody!"

"This is ridiculous. There's no turnoff along here. It's solid guard-rails for six miles!"

"But they did turn off. Or just disappeared!"

"They turned off their lights, that's what they did. Or pushed in the wrong switch, or lost the battery ground strap. I can't stop here. We'll wait at the foot of the grade, where it gets to be Beverly Hills."

They drove down the hill. At the bottom he turned the car around and parked it beside the first house, with his headlights shining back up the road. Time passed and no following car appeared. After fifteen minutes a tan-and-black patrol car came down the grade.

"Hey, buddy! Cut off those lights!" the patrolman ordered as he pulled up across the road from Carson.

The lawyer complied. "You see anybody in front of you?" he asked.

"Hell, no. You waiting for someone?" the officer asked. Seeing Adele, he added: "Oh, beg your pardon, miss. Didn't know you were there."

"It's all right," she smiled. "You should hear /him/ talk sometimes," she said, indicating Carson.

"I've heard him," the cop asserted. "Heard him downtown. What's a high-priced mouthpiece like you doing out here after dark, anyway?" he asked Carson. "Still-hunting for a client?"

"The good ones come up the other way," the lawyer chaffed. "Run up the gully from Rodeo Drive and break cover about here."

"Yeah, but the season's over. For you, at least. C'mon, move it!"

"Seriously, officer," Carson replied, "I've lost a client on this hill. He was driving behind me from the Crowncrest and just disappeared."

"Must have turned off on that trail that goes behind the Hollywood sign," suggested the patrolman.

"No, I saw him after that."

"You musta seen somebody else."

"So where did that somebody else go?"

"Hell, don't ask me. You're the mouthpiece. You'll think up something. Just don't think it up out here, where Mr. Amthor don't like people taking up his parking space for petting parties. Begging your pardon, miss."

"OK, officer, if you disapprove of our lawful activities we'll leave," conceded the lawyer. He started his car, made a U-turn, and proceeded toward downtown.

"Why did you say he -- the French guy -- was a client?" asked Adele as they crossed the boulevard stop at Rodeo.

"Can't hurt. If he needs a lawyer, I'm in. If he doesn't, he won't be getting in touch."

"And if he needs a lawyer because he was out robbing a liquor store?"

"I don't think that's why he stopped. There aren't any on that grade that I know of. Wonder why he didn't give me a ticket for that U-turn?"

"He liked you. Didn't you notice?"

"My God, I'm becoming popular with the County cops! I don't believe it one minute."

"Beverly Hills Police."

"Oh. That could be true. I don't think I've ever beaten them out of



a victim."

"Victim?" quizzed Adele, with a lifted eyebrow.

"You know what I mean," Carson replied firmly. "Victims of injustice, of Assistant D. A.'s trying to run up their percentage convictions, victims of flatfooted patrolmen bucking for a promotion and a hundred-dollar raise, victims of county-courthouse politicians trying to get their names in the newspaper ... " he trailed off.

"At least you don't get upset about it anymore," his secretary observed.

"No, all in the day's work."

"I think I'd like living in Beverly Hills," she mused. "They have decent cops, apparently, who actually get out and patrol. And those shops are very attractive. We wouldn't need to get a big place ..."

"It would just /cost/ like a mansion," he interjected.

"Right, you would have to find a filthy rich /victim/," she observed seriously, then broke out laughing.

He chuckled. "Speaking of which, where the Hell is our dusky French couple?" He shook his head as he braked at Cahuenga. "Well, we won't worry about it. I've done my good deed for the day and it's not my lookout if it didn't take. Want to catch a movie?" he asked Adele.

"You mean that little place we just passed. What was the name?"

"What they were showing was /Oedipus Rex/." He pronounced it Oh-Edipus.

"What? This is sure an off-beat neighborhood, but I don't expect Aeschylus."

"Who? If you'll translate for me, I'm game."

"They'll have subtitles."

"If it's stuff like that you'll have to translate the subtitles."

They parked on the street and entered the storefront movie theater. Twenty minutes later a dark-blue 1936 Ford Tudor with a mass of chrome accessories and twin sidemounts drove by unobserved. After two hours the filmgoers emerged.

"Not exactly my kind of flick," allowed the lawyer. "There once was a man named Oedipus Rex ... " he sang softly.

"Quit! You just don't understand Culture," Adele claimed, and swung her purse at him.

"Ouch!" he complained, crouching and raising his arms in defense.

"You win. We'll come back here tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, creeping our petty pace from day to day and seeing every grainy, badly-lit flick in all the Eastern European languages!"

"I can hardly wait," she replied, grimly. "It was pretty bad," she conceded.

"Ah. You're becoming human again. Now where?" he queried.

"Home," Adele suggested. "Maybe it was a mistake. Seeing that film on top of a full bottle of Chianti."

"Home, and to bed," Carson elucidated, smacking his lips.

"Hah. Headache. Savvy? Catchee woman head hurt, no coochee?"

"No catchee coochee?" he replied, dismayed.

"You got it. Or you don't got it. You're not gonna get it, I mean."

"Oh, shucks. Maybe something will turn up at my apartment," he teased.

"I've seen that apartment hotel. Unless the bell captain has some new recruits I think you have better taste."

"There once was a man named Oedipus Rex," he resumed singing. "Mammy, mammy, how I love ya, how I love ya, my dear old mammy!" He drove Adele to her apartment, collected a kiss, and went home.

## II.

Next morning at nine he strode into his outer office, said hello to the switchboard operator and the typist, and, opening the inner door, tossed his hat accurately onto the bust of Rufus Choate that stood atop his filing cabinet. Seeing Adele's expression as she sat in his chair behind his desk immediately sobered him. She raised the folded morning newspaper to his sight. "Remember him?" she asked.

He took the paper and sat in the client's chair to read it. The one-column story head read, "Haitian Visitor Found Dead In Central Avenue Dance Hall". Octave Hippolyte Christophe was discovered dead of a gunshot wound to the head shortly after 10pm the previous night. Nobody was suspected of the crime, at least nobody the Police were talking about. There was no apparent motive although the body had been robbed. M. Christophe was a consular agent of the Republique d'Haiti. Whether he was in Los Angeles on official business had not yet been determined. The article made no mention of his wife, or why he had entered a dance dive in a very dangerous part of town, or why, having done so, he had gone into a storeroom backing onto the alley.

"This is exactly what I want no part of," commented Carson.

"You have to call Trent," Miss Hall pointed out. "He'll hear about it from the Beverly Hills cop."

"You know what I went through on Trent's last case," the lawyer complained. "Oh, all right, place the call," he groused.

Adele rotated the telephone dial. "Lieutenant Trent, please," she spoke. "Earl Carson's office," she elucidated. "Yes, he's here. Hold on." She passed the handset across the desk to the lawyer.

"Hello, Lieutenant, how goes the business of securing the lives and property of us citizens?"

"Well, I don't really feel responsible for /his/ life."

"So I talked to him in the parking lot."

"And so I said he was a client. A prospective client was what I meant."

"I was going to steer him to a colored hotel. He was turned down at the Wilshire."

"Yeah, beats the Hell out of me, too. A dump like that putting on airs."

"No, not myself. I have a few Negro clients, they'd know."

"I didn't. Never saw him again after I lost him on the grade down from the Crowncrest."

He moved the speaker away from his ear. A loud squawking came from it. "Calm down, Lieutenant. I can't explain it, either."

"Now that's an idea. Adele, did you actually /see/ him driving that Ford?"

She considered the question. "No, I did not," she replied, judiciously. "I didn't even see them get into the car, now that you mention it."

Carson relayed this information over the phone. A period of silence ensued. "Still there?" he asked, at length.

"Well, if you want to think up plots for /Black Mask/ go right ahead. I'm just telling you what I know of the deceased. He had a wife with him, too, did you know that?"

Again he moved the phone away from his ear. When the noise subsided he spoke into it: "I'll let you know if she turns up here. Good-bye, Lieutenant. It's just a bunch of routine now, isn't it?"

"Where the Hell /is/ Haiti, anyway?"

"So who cares?"

"So let 'em. If they come ashore at San Pedro they'll never get past the greasers in West L.A."

"Comes with the badge, Lieutenant. If the guy's dead, he's not my client, now, is he?"

"I'll read the papers. Let Adele know if you need anything. Good-bye." He hung up the phone. "Now maybe we can get some work done," he commented hopefully. They set to it.

After appearing in court at the afternoon session, he returned to his office to put his papers back in the file and close up shop. "Lieutenant Trent came by," Adele mentioned casually.

"What did he want?"

"Description of Mrs. Christophe. I gave it to him."

"/Madame/ Christophe. Good thing you noticed her. I didn't."

"Sure you didn't," she commented wryly. "She was quite a looker."

"If you like that kind," he replied. "I grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, don't forget." He finished closing the blinds.

"On the ol' plantation, with Mammy in a red bandanna and Mammy's yaller daughter in ... what?"

"You, young woman, have a nasty, twisted mind. Tell me some more."

"No, I remember now. You got involved in the Coca-Cola Company instead of the ol' plantation. Went around selling fizzy water and rotting the teeth of American Youth."

"Now you know that's not my fault," he complained, ushering her out and locking the door. "Coca-Cola is less acidic than orange juice."

"Then why do they use it to wash out car radiators?" Adele asked as they waited for the elevator.

"We've been over this before," he replied. The elevator arrived and they entered, barely finding room at the front. "Lobby," he told the operator, who had already closed the doors and started the car down. "Orange juice would work just as well, as would vinegar," he continued, to Adele. "Even better. The problem, according to the American Dental Association, is all that sugar. If kids go around sucking on candy all day they're going to rot their teeth. Whether they get the sugar out of a Coke bottle instead makes no difference."

"Um h'm," Adele commented, having lost interest and having heard it before. He escorted her out to the parking lot, collected a kiss, and watched her drive off.

III.

"Trent called," Adele told the lawyer as he returned from court several days later. "Sounds like trouble. The Feebies want to talk to you."

"Hell, I paid my taxes. If they can't figure out your accounts ..." he started.

"The F.B.I., not the Revenooers," she insisted. "It's about that Christophe case."

"What Christophe case? I talk to the guy in a parking lot and suddenly I'm responsible for him getting shot down on Central," Carson complained.

"He actually was a Haitian Consul, or so Trent says. Figure the Feds are looking up some diplomatic angle to it."

"Let 'em look," the lawyer replied, disgusted.

"So what do I tell them?" his secretary insisted.

"Make an appointment. I'll have to talk to them, I guess."

The G-men showed up, per appointment, at the start of business two days later. Carson was not entirely successful in disguising his irritation as he guided them into his inner office.

"Holbrook Ames," the senior of the two introduced himself.

"As it says on your card," the lawyer replied, taking it from his desk blotter. "Do you give real names or fake ones?"

Mr. Ames gave him a small, disapproving smile but said nothing.

Carson grimaced. The two agents were dressed identically, to F.B.I. regulations doubtless, conservatively and unobtrusively if you ignored the strangeness of two grown men selecting exactly the same coats, shirts, ties, and pocket handkerchiefs. That bothered him, as did the buzz-cuts revealed once they'd left their (identical) fedoras on the hat-rack. But the whole business bothered him, especially Mr. Ames, so-called.

"Monsieur Octave Christophe," the younger agent suddenly started reciting. "Forty-two, one-sixteen, five foot seven, black."

"I noticed," Carson interjected, but they ignored him.

"Unmarried," the agent continued. Ames leaned forward significantly.

"Tch, tch," the lawyer commented.

"Consul of Republique d'Haiti in New Orleans, reported missing there

a week ago. Found dead in Los Angeles late the same day. No known reason for going to California. No relatives or business connections here."

Ames looked at Carson. "Except you," he said.

"Me!" the lawyer exclaimed. "Why, I only met the man once in my life!"

The F.B.I. men nodded at each other.

"And hey, wait, run that description by me again!"

The agent complied.

"That wasn't him. The guy I talked to weighed at least one-fifty. You described a thin Negro. This one wasn't."

This puzzled the two visitors. "You say the Haitians don't know what their consular officials look like?" sneered Ames. "Or you think we got the wrong dope from Washington?"

"You know, it's a mistake to argue with a witness. If your idea of what happened doesn't jive with what the witness says you change your idea. Unless you have some reason for thinking he's giving you a line. I'm not," the lawyer said.

"We don't make mistakes," the other F.B.I. man claimed.

"You try to cover them up. Doesn't always work. What screw-up are you trying to bury now? Were you supposed to body-guard the late Haitian Consul?" the lawyer inquired, with an unpleasant smile.

No reply.

"If you have any more questions, ask them. I have work to do and I don't get paid if it doesn't get done," Carson informed them.

The agents looked at each other. After enough of a pause to re-assert his importance, Ames said, "We'll be back," and the two left.

After showing them out, Miss Hall came back to the inner office and asked Carson, impatiently, "Can't you handle those people? You're getting in a bunch of trouble."

"No, I can't," admitted the lawyer. "And this trouble is, as far as I can tell, pretty damn inevitable once you get some bonehead Feds working on it. It wasn't Christophe; they don't want to admit that. I'd better check in with the locals. Trent will know if the Coroner has an ID on the stiff."

"Will he tell you?" Adele cautioned.

"Maybe not right out. If he's seen our buddies from Washington I think he'll give. Dial the number, will you?" he requested.

Adele got the Lieutenant on the phone. "How's the suspect?" he asked the lawyer.

"Objected to as a blanket accusation. What suspect?" Carson replied.

"You, of course. J. Edgar is on your trail. You better watch out!"

"Christ! Do they think I dragged him down to Central and shot him?"

"Think? Since when do the Feebies think? They've got to finger somebody and you're it, friend!"

"Don't say that," Carson replied, shaken.

"Well, they've been looking you up. You know how popular you are down at the D. A.'s office. Bet he gave them an earful."

"If it's just his B. S. I've got no problems. What I want to know is who got murdered at that dance hall."

"Who?" Trent was surprised. "Why, Octave Christophe, the Consular Agent of Haiti in New Orleans!"

"Not from the description the Feds gave me," Carson claimed.

"Let's take a look at it," Trent conceded. A shuffling of papers came over the phone. "Here it is. Octave Hippolyte Christophe. Age, forty-two. Skin, dark. Yeah, pretty dark for L.A. Anyway, height five-seven, weight one-sixteen. Real skinny guy."

"Yeah. So he's not the stiff."

"What the Hell do you mean. The stiff matches the description. We got the prints today and they match. It's Octave Hippolyte Christophe all right, large as life."

"Oh," Carson commented. "Then I've never seen him in my life, and I mean /never/."

The Lieutenant thought this over. "He wasn't the guy at the Crowncrest?"

"Nope."

"I've been running down a bum lead?"

"Yep."

"A bum lead you gave me?"

"Sounds like it."

"You're a son-of-a-bitch."

"An honest one. And that means even the Feds can't harass me. I know nothing. Nothing at all."

"Better tell them that."

"I did. Doubt they noticed, but I did tell them. They're not real impressionable."

"I'll mention it to them again."

"Better point out that I've got a witness. Make that /witnesses/. They can't Hooverize me without going to a lot of trouble."

"They might do that."

"Don't go too strong on it, then. Just kinda mention that some other people saw the ringer and saw me talking to him."

"And who are these other people?"

"You'll find out at the trial."

"Hah. Another bum steer. I'll tell them what you told me, but just as what you told me."

"Kinda natural like. Not something I want to feed them but what you picked up in your work on the case."

"Something a criminal lawyer told me to tell them."

"That'll get my ass in even deeper! Give me a break."

"I'll tell them, when they come up here at three P.M., that you say the person you talked to was not the stiff and was not, therefore, the guy from Haiti. That'll get them stirred up on who the Hell he was and they'll be bothering you again, a lot. But you're stuck with it, aren't you now?"

"Guess I am."

"Be good," the Lieutenant advised, and hung up the phone.

#### IV.

The Federal agents returned the next day, this time without an appointment.

"I can give you ten minutes," Carson allowed. Again Ames disdained to reply. He took a notepad out of his inner pocket, opened and looked at it. The other agent -- not the same one as yesterday -- took out his pad and a pencil and got ready to take notes.

"Describe the Negro you spoke to at the Crowncrest Tavern," Ames ordered.



"I'll write out a description and send it to your office. You working out of the Federal Building?" Carson countered.

Ames closed his notebook and gave the lawyer a hard look. The other agent, however, lifted his left hand in a placating gesture. "Mr. Carson," he began.

"That's me. Who are you?"

"Oh. Agent Frankland, New Orleans office. Ben Frankland, but I don't use the first name. People get my last name wrong when I do."

Carson nodded and relaxed a little.

"People sometimes get the wrong idea about the Bureau. This is a free country and the citizens dislike being questioned in a detached and professional manner. The local officers are, I admit, usually more polite because they're looking to the next election or their superiors are. But we have a job to do and we do it efficiently."

"The Kansas City Massacre, for instance," Carson interjected.

This threw Frankland off his topic momentarily. "Yes, the Kansas City incident, for example. The local law enforcement would not have escorted the prisoner effectively and prevented his escape. But not only did he not escape, the agents laid down their lives to kill the gangsters who tried to break him loose. And they learned their lesson."

"Being dead. Or were they?"

"No, but the word got around that it wasn't a healthy thing to do, to take Tommy guns and try to get your buddy away from an F.B.I. escort. We haven't had an attempt since."

"I heard it differently, but go on," Carson replied.

Again the Federal agent was momentarily nonplussed. "Well, we have a Consul of the Republic of Haiti murdered in a place of entertainment in Los Angeles. First you say you spoke with him earlier in the day, now you say you did not. Am I correct?"

"I spoke with a colored couple who introduced themselves as Hippolyte and Virginie Christophe. They didn't say anything about Haiti. The man was not the same one as the stiff of that name now in the Morgue."

"Very good. Very professional and precise. I wish all our suspects, I mean witnesses, were so clear." Quite a blunder, Carson thought as the agent hastened on. "You told Lieutenant ... "

"Trent," Ames supplied.

"Lieutenant Trent, that several other people saw you talking to that

person."

"They did. I didn't take their names but I can produce them in court if necessary," Carson replied, with the mental reservation that it was at least possible although not a verified fact. "I expect that Selby told you I'm good at producing witnesses."

"Yes, District Attorney Selby assured us that you are quite competent at preparing and presenting cases."

"I don't think he put it that way."

"He was a little more emphatic and, ah, more critical," Frankland allowed. "But what we need more information on is the incident of the Negro couple failing to follow you down the road. You say they were driving a 1936 Ford automobile?"

"No, I don't say that now. I never saw them driving or even getting into a car. Neither did my secretary, who was with me. Somebody drove a 1936 Ford automobile" -- Carson was careful to mimic the officialese -- "out of the parking lot and started to follow me down the grade. I don't know who it was."

"But it was most likely the Christophes?"

"I have no idea. Especially as they weren't the Christophes in the first place, were they?"

Ames broke in: "Didn't you look back in your mirror and see who was in the other car?"

"Now that you mention it ... no. They had six driving lights going and I couldn't see a thing."

He grunted disapproval. "Then why did you feel it necessary to report the incident to the Beverly Hills Police Department?" Frankland asked.

"I didn't. A patrol cop came along, asked me what I was doing, and I told him."

"Well, you understand we need a description of the people you did talk to up there." Frankland took up his pencil and looked expectant.

"I'll write it down and send it to you at the Fed Building. Now, as I said, I have an appointment to meet and it has been ten minutes or a little more, so I'll have to ask you to leave." They didn't like the dismissal but allowed Carson to show them out of his office. He heard Adele bid them good-bye and shut the outer door. As usual, she came in to ask for instructions and offer opinions if required.

The lawyer had one question. "Did the new guy give you his name when he walked in, Adele?"

"No," she replied, surprised. "What was it?"

"Ben Frankland," he answered. "Not that it matters."

"And the other guy is George Washington? Doesn't look his age," she said, flippantly. "What was the Kansas City Massacre?"

"An F.B.I. frame-up. Two gangsters with Tommy guns tried to break a buddy loose. The Feebies shot the prisoner and each other but not the gunmen, then faked up the evidence two years later when one of them was arrested. One of the gangsters, I mean. I mentioned it to get them off-base."

"Did it work?"

"They were way out in left field anyway. The fact is that I don't know a damn thing about Octave Hippolyte Christophe and I'll be damned if ..." he trailed off.

His secretary started to ask what he was thinking about but knew not to interrupt him when he got that abstracted mood. She silently left the inner office and closed the door.

V.

"That's him. The earthly remains of Octave Hippolyte Christophe, ex-Consul of Haiti," said Trent as he drew back the sheet. The body rested on a pulled-out drawer in the refrigerated Morgue of Los Angeles County.

Earl Carson looked down at the dead face. "Not the same person, but close. Could have been a relative."

"Well, you know they say they all look the same. Not to a policeman they don't, but you being a lawyer ..."

"I notice things. I read faces in the courtroom and I notice them on the street. This is a relative of the guy I talked to in the parking lot." Carson shivered. "Push that thing back and let's get out of here."

Lieutenant Trent signaled to the attendant and he and Carson left the Morgue. As the halves of the door swung back into place, the lawyer repeated, "Octave Hippolyte Christophe. How typical that he would have three names."

"A lot of people do. Ever notice how cheap magazine writers always have three names?"

"Those skin mags you buy, maybe. But Octave Hippolyte Christophe. Do you think he went by Octave?"

"Who knows? You say you didn't talk to him and I sure as Hell didn't."

"But I did talk to a guy named Hippolyte Christophe."

Trent stopped suddenly. "So that was on the level?"

"Don't see why not," Carson replied and continued down the corridor. Trent fell in beside him. "Has a name he doesn't use, maybe. Septimus Hippolyte Christophe. Sextus Hippolyte Christophe. You wouldn't go by /Sextus/, would you? Maybe you'd let your wife call you Sexy sometimes, but other people would tend to slap you first."

"We don't know that," Trent cautioned.

"We don't know a hell of a lot," Carson continued. "But it makes sense. Could even be that the last name is Hippolyte-dash-Christophe. Like all those double-barreled Mexican names. Santos-Gonzales. Pinto-Gutierrez."

"He was telling you his last name, not his first? And then he gave you his wife's first name?"

"OK, you shot that down. His middle name is Hippolyte. So his brother, the Consul, comes here from New Orleans for whatever reason. He's not real businesslike so the Consulate people there think he's disappeared instead of just gone on a trip. Some sudden, important family business, maybe."

"You're making this up."

"Sure I am. We don't know a damn thing for sure. But how else are we going to find out anything? So he comes here on family business, the business takes him to Central Avenue, he gets shot there. The brother doesn't want to get mixed up in it ..."

"Or maybe he's dead, too. Or maybe he's the shooter," Trent suggested.

"Whatever. So you go find him and get the story. Right?"

"Sure. Get the story from a corpse, or have the murderer tell us all about shooting his brother. No difficulty at all," Trent replied.

"We don't know that happened. You just need to get busy and find the brother, or cousin, or whatever."

"Oh, good, some detective work to do. I get so bored just sitting around the squad room eating donuts. But the Feebies said he didn't have any relatives here," Trent remembered.

"A lot they know. I wouldn't trust them to find out if he had a father and a mother."

It took a second for the Lieutenant to get it.

VI.

Later that afternoon Adele Hall looked into Carson's office. The lawyer was writing at his desk, consulting in turn three weighty law books spread open before him. She turned away, closing the door silently.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Petrali, Mr. Carson is writing a brief," she told the man waiting in the outer office. "The case comes up tomorrow and his instructions were not to disturb him unless with a matter of life and death. Surely your information isn't?" she smiled.

The visitor grinned back. Not used to wearing a suit, she observed to herself, and that one obviously hasn't seen much use since 1935 when those lapels were in fashion. Like the bow tie. He ducked his head a moment and then replied: "Sure, Miss, it's no big deal. It's just that Link wanted me to get the word to Mr. Carson and let him take it and run."

"Run?"

"Run with the ball. You know, do whatever."

"And who is Link? The name sounds familiar," she allowed.

"Link Williams. He said you helped him out with his job at Convair. Some mess about overtime."

"Oh, now I remember. Will you get out the file on Abraham Williams, Gertie?" she asked the receptionist-and-file-clerk. She made a wave-off motion with her right hand, held behind her hips where the visitor couldn't see it. Gertie nodded, all but imperceptibly, and moved over to the file cabinet.

"So what is he ..." she began, but stopped. You don't discuss clients with other clients. "Why did he send you? He knows he can come up and talk to us anytime, doesn't he?"

"Well, no, Miss, he didn't want to do that," Petrali replied. "He works for me out at Hughes and he thought I'd explain things better."

She shook her head impatiently. Gertie riffled through the files in one drawer, pushed it in and started on another. The inner office door opened and Carson stuck his head out. "Joe Petrali," he said.

"That's me, sir," the visitor said with relief. "You Mr. Carson?"

"That's me," the lawyer agreed. "Come on in and talk," he invited, opening the door wide. Petrali strode across and into the inner office.

"Damn him," Adele said under her voice.

Gertie opened the first file drawer again, quickly took out the Williams

file, and offered it to her. "You take it in. Please," she added.

"God, I need a break from this law stuff," Carson explained as he motioned Petrali to the client's chair. "Cigarette?" he offered. The visitor took one and offered Carson his lighter. They puffed away for a minute. "Saw you last at Santa Monica, I think," Carson claimed.

"Lousy place. Board track and rotten as Hell," Petrali amplified. "Never knew when you'd stick a wheel through. That's why we slid around so much. Go straight into a missing board and break your neck."

"Yeah, well, we all had to take chances back in the Thirties. Monica was running until the War closed it down, I think."

"Later than that. They made a lot of money off the war-workers. Should have seen the crowd at the Pier any weekend."

"Wasn't out here then. Did Harley have a team going?" the lawyer asked.

"No. They were busy making all those shaftie bikes for the Army. Some guys bought up the old Peashooters but they didn't last long, not when you couldn't get any parts for 'em."

Gertie brought in the file and laid it on the desk. Carson thanked her and she left.

"So what brings you here today?" he asked Petrali.

"Link Williams. I see you got the stuff on him, right?"

"What stuff there is. We did some work for him."

"Yeah, he told me. Said you were real smart and got him out of a mess."

"Didn't take any smarts, just figuring out the right thing and sticking to it. Haven't seen him since, wish we had. I like to keep in touch with people," Carson explained.

"He's in real trouble now," Petrali claimed.

"Sorry to hear it," the lawyer replied, evenly.

After an uncomfortable few seconds of silence, the visitor continued. "I /think/ he's in real trouble. He sounded real scared. The reason he had me come up here is that he thinks people are following him around. Didn't want them to know he was talking to you. I mean, talking to any lawyer."

"Sounds like he thinks it's the cops keeping an eye on him."

"Yeah. You can see how he doesn't want them thinking he's guilty and needs a mouthpiece."

"Well, I'm not exactly a /mouthpiece/," the lawyer disagreed. "And there's nothing incriminatory about going to an attorney. Like I said, I wish he would have dropped in sometime sooner."

"Yeah," Petrali agreed, "but he didn't. I guess. Hell, I don't know what he's been doing. He's a stand-up guy and I owe him a few, so I said I'd come here and get you to go talk to him. Someplace where the cops can't follow him."

The lawyer shook his head. "That would be even worse, him dropping out of sight all of a sudden. And what if they did find him? That would look suspicious as Hell, him and me having a conference at some hide-out. Wouldn't do me any good downtown, either."

"I think it's more than the cops that's bothering him," Petrali said. "He told me to make /sure/ that nobody trailed me here, either. Now like you said, I can go see a lawyer any time, no problem. So if somebody's on /my/ trail it's a private dick."

"/Is/ there somebody following you?" Carson asked.

"No. Sure of it."

"Did anybody try?"

"Can't be so sure of that. I did some dodging around, getting here."

The lawyer allowed himself a tight smile at the amateurish claim. "First thing to do is get Clark watching your back trail," he decided. "See who these dicks are and who they're working for." He picked up the desk phone, put it down. Thinking again, he picked it up and dialed a single number. "Gertie," he spoke, "go down to Phil's office and send him up here if he's in. No, don't call. Leave Adele at the switchboard if you have to. OK, thanks."

"You think there /is/ somebody trailing me?" Petrali asked, worried.

"Have to find out. No reason to guess," Carson explained. He looked out the window while his visitor thought over the situation. The phone rang once and Carson picked up the handset. "Yeah, send him in," he said into it.

The door opened and Phil Clark entered. The lawyer introduced Petrali and the men shook hands. Clark pulled up a chair.

"Mr. Petrali thinks he's being followed and I want you to find out who and why," Carson explained.

"Well, it's not me really. You want I should tell him about Link?" Petrali interjected.

"Yeah, we might as well make that part of the job," Carson allowed. Petrali repeated the story of his errand and why Williams didn't want

to come to the law office himself.

"Got it," said the detective, but made no motion to leave.

"Good," said the lawyer, expansively. "We'll get what information we can, Joe," he continued, "and take it from there. I don't think it'll be more than one or two days. Then we can decide how and when I'm going to meet Mr. Williams." He stood and offered his hand.

Petralli shook it doubtfully. "What do I tell Link?" he asked.

"Tell him we're working on it. He should stay away from here in the meanwhile. Give him Phil's card -- you have one, Phil?" The detective took out his case and gave a business card to Petralli. "If he gets in trouble have him call Phil, who'll get in touch with me. Day or night," Carson finished, confidently.

Petralli grinned, still dubiously, and left.

"Now, what's the dope?" Clark asked Carson after they heard the corridor door shut. "I know you didn't send Gertie after me just to put a man on a client's trail." His smile radiated good-nature and cynicism.

"You did set that up, didn't you?"

Clark waved his hand dismissively. "Elementary, my dear Carson. The kind of clients you get need watching so much it's S.O.P. with us down the hall. Bet you'd be surprised at some things we've found out."

"You blackmailing S.O.B.," Carson said cheerfully.

"You really think your phone is tapped?" the detective casually asked.

"I kinda think so. The Feebies have been around and it's been sounding kinda funny the past two days."

"Like you're in some big concrete room?"

"Exactly. What causes that?"

"Them doing a sloppy job, as expected. If you just put two clips on at the junction box the added resistance damps out the harmonics. You also get an echo if you don't isolate the wire recorder."

"I thought a ferrite-tape recorder gave better quality."

"It does, but for wiretaps wire is better. Doesn't break."

"See you know all about it," Carson grinned.

"Oh, just theoretically," Clark smiled back. "Nobody ever gives /us/ a warrant to do it."



"Like they got one."

"They could have. Check all the Federal calendars, why don't you?"

"Because you know they didn't. They never do." The lawyer hitched himself forward in his leather swivel chair. He gave Clark a summary of the Christophe business.

Clark mulled the information over for a few seconds. "What doesn't click is this Williams getting involved," he asserted. "Assuming it is the Feebies, how did they get his number? He didn't come here. You know any connection between him and the Christophes?"

"Not a thing, Phil. Maybe you'll find something," Carson proposed.

"So you want me to do a job on this Abraham Lincoln Williams, too," Clark stated, picking up the client's folder and reading the full name from it.

"Yeah, guess I have to."

"Who's paying for it? You gonna charge Williams for some ops putting in time finding out about Williams?"

Carson gave him a blank look. "Didn't think about that. In fact, I don't have a client in this case. Yet."

Clark laughed. "You slay me. For a straight-thinking high-priced lawyer you sure don't have any business sense. Oh, well, you'll flush a sugar daddy from cover. You always do," he chuckled as he rose to leave.

"Be sure to bring that folder back when you've copied it," Carson retorted. Clark merely nodded Yes as he left.

VII.

Next day, as Earl and Adele descended the Hall of Justice steps on their way to lunch, he sniffed the air and commented: "That sun feels good but I could do without the burnt smell. House on fire or trash incinerator, do you think?"

"No," Adele said, "it's just the temperature inversion."

"The what?"

"The inversion. The cool air coming over the mountains sometimes just spreads out over the warmer air of the coastal basin. The Indians called this the 'Valley of Smokes'. When the cool air is on top and there's not much breeze the haze collects in the lower layer. They call that an /inversion/."

"The Indians do? I thought there weren't any Indians around here anymore," the lawyer teased.

"No, you goof," she pushed him playfully. "The weatherman says that. He isn't an Indian as far as I know. Look, there's Phil! Hello, Phil!" she waved.

Clark and another man strode over to join them. "Bert Humphreys, one of my ops," the detective introduced him while scanning the bystanders unobtrusively. "He has some dope I think you should get now."

"I trust your judgment, Phil," Carson assured him. Clark nodded, gratified. "Exercise it and tell us where we should get lunch."

His look of gratification disappeared. "How about the Milestone Cafeteria? We can talk private there."

"See the workings of an expert detective," Carson commented to his secretary. "A booth at Pietro's is too conspicuous. At the Milestone you can hardly hear yourself talk over the noise of those metal trays so any eavesdropper will be T.S.O.L."

Clark grimaced. "If you want two six-dollar lunches on the expense account Pietro's is just fine by me," he retorted. "You get anything in that traction case this morning?" he added as they walked.

"Objected to as self-incriminatory. Won't tell you until I get your bill for this job," Carson joked as he pushed open the swinging glass door of the Cafeteria for Adele. The expected clatter rose to meet them.

As they pushed their trays along the tubular rails in front of the glass-cased steam tables, Clark began: "It was the Feebies, all right, on Petralli and on Williams. Let Bert tell you about it ..." he nudged Carson. At a table near the street window sat two men, conspicuous in identical black suits, narrow black ties, and unusually close haircuts. Carson smilingly lead his party to that table.

"Why, what a pleasant surprise!" he announced as they seated themselves next to the two F.B.I. agents. "Agents Frankland and Ames, I believe." He gestured to Humphreys to take the seat next to Ames. He himself sat next to Frankland, with Phil Clark and Adele Hall at the end of the table.

"We've met," commented Humphreys. "These birds have been trailing me all morning."

"Find out anything?" the lawyer cheerfully asked Agent Frankland.

"Now we have," the G-man stated. He took out his notebook and made an entry. "Fried chicken breast too dry. Stick to dark meat," he pretended to read.

"You must have got a bad piece, last one in the bin," commented Phil Clark

helpfully. "Try some barbecue sauce on it." He fetched a squeeze bottle from the next table.

"Thanks," said Frankland, applying the sauce.

"I'd ask you about the wiretap but you wouldn't say anything, would you?" continued Carson.

Ames frowned at him. "Which one?" countered Frankland.

"Didn't think of that, Phil," Carson laughed. "I bet they've got Petralli and Williams tapped, too."

"Who?" asked Frankland, with a poker face.

"You know, Joe Petralli, the short-track motorcycle racer, and Esther Williams, the fancy swimmer and diver," the lawyer answered.

"Hear she's got a Technicolor film coming out soon," the agent observed.

The conversation paused while the group ate.

Ames pushed back his chair and lifted his tray. "Don't go yet," Carson told him. "Mr. Humphreys here was going to give us his report and I bet you'd like to hear it."

The agent hesitated.

"Surely you can stay and listen to it, Mr. Frankland," the lawyer offered.

"Brookie's in charge here. I'm just a visiting fireman," Frankland disclaimed.

"OK, say your piece," commanded Ames, sitting back down.

Carson nodded at Humphreys, who looked at Clark and got his nod. The operative began: "Relieved Slemansky at four-fifty-eight A. M. He pointed out F.B.I. agents also observing residence."

"What residence?" Frankland broke in.

"Williams," Clark answered.

"You know, Esther Williams, the water sports woman," Carson added.

Ames snorted.

"Made Feebies -- I mean F.B.I. agents -- and took idents," Humphreys continued.

"He means he took down your license plate number, the description of your car, anything that would identify you," Clark expounded.

"Knew that already," Ames said. "Did the same to him."

"Nothing until six-twenty-seven. Alarm clock went off, lights on, people getting up and moving around house. Subject left in car -- already had the scrip of the car -- wife on porch," the op reported.

"Wife? How do you know it's his wife?" Carson asked, playfully.

"Looked her up, of course," Clark supplied. "Got her description and right thumbprint from the Motor Vehicle records. History and maiden name backtracked from the marriage certificate on file. It's Virginie Williams, all right."

He didn't notice the effect the name had on the lawyer, his secretary, and the F.B.I. men. Humphreys continued: "Followed subject. Impeded by Feebies, I mean F.B.I. agents, also following through empty residential streets. Lost subject at Caliente but kept contact with G. agents who picked up subject again. Arrived Hughes Aircraft gate Santa Barbara seven-twenty-five. Subject entered gate. F.B.I. agents went to gate, talked with guard. Didn't get in. Shorter agent headed toward phone booth. I got there first and planted bug. Agent called Fed Building, asked for Supervisor Breel, gave report of events and presence of other ops (us) on the case. Breel said other agents would take subject Williams and they should follow other ops (me). Some argument about leaving subject unobserved. End of phone call. Retrieved bug, left for office. F.B.I. agents followed. Went with the Boss from office to notify client. That's it," he concluded.

"So you intercepted an official communication," Ames said.

"There's no law against planting a microphone in a public place," Carson replied. "And there's no law against listening to a Fed's conversation. The same laws apply to you as to the rest of us," he pointed out.

"Interfering with a Federal investigation is a Federal crime."

"Nobody interfered with anybody. You may not like being under surveillance, but it didn't stop you from making your investigation, or whatever you call what you've been doing all day. Did your other guys show up to keep tabs on Williams?"

"Hah," Ames said. "Anything more for us here?" he asked Frankland, who shook his head. "Let's get out of here then. I expect Breel will get the Federal prosecutor on you," he informed the others. "Be seeing you in court."

"Don't try to practice law without a license," Carson countered. "Be seeing you." They left.

Carson started to speak but Humphreys held his finger to his lips. As soon as the black-suited Feds disappeared from view on the street, he dug between the sugar packets on the table rack and brought out a tiny microphone, not more than half an inch round and a quarter of an inch

deep. He laid it on the table in front of him. "Those Feds sure are tough to mess with," he said, speaking directly into the bug and rolling his eyes to cue the others.

"Yep," contributed Clark. "I sure hope you're right about the law, Earl. I can reach Phelan -- he's a corrupt son-of-a-bitch -- but I don't know if he'll let /you/ off for love or money!"

Carson had difficulty suppressing his laughter.

"Oh, Earl," interposed Adele, "I'm so scared!"

The lawyer had to stand up and walk a few steps, holding his hands over his mouth. The diners at the other tables started to take notice.

"Well, I know one thing," Humphreys continued. "I'm not gonna cross any G-men! Pull me off this case this minute!"

"Right, Bert," Clark said, his voice cracking under the strain. "We're all off it!" He staggered out of his chair. "What's so funny, bud?" asked a bus driver seated at the next table.

Carson took up the bug and carefully dropped into his glass of water. The busboy appeared and took it away along with the rest of their plates, trays, and utensils. After a few deep breaths, the lawyer's mood returned almost to normal. Still not speaking, he rose and indicated that they should all leave. He silently paid their bill and left. As they emerged into the sunshine, though, he let loose, guffawing and slapping his thighs. The others contented themselves with smiling.

"Well," he said at length, "let's hear the part you left out, Bert."

"Nothing, Mr. Carson," the detective responded. "Of course, after the Feds latched on to me Ricardo had some developments. The Boss'll want to tell you about those. Right, Phil?"

"Guess I should," the agency owner replied. "You want to stick around or you know it already?"

"He clued me in. You know the policy."

"OK, Bert. You're off this afternoon if you want it. Check in at the office around five."

"Good. I'll go catch some sun. I could take a night job or do without it, just as the business goes."

"Right. Let you know at five."

"So long, then," Humphreys told the others. "Pleased to meet you, Miss Hall."

"Charmed," she smiled. The detective tipped his hat and went back to

the lot where his car was parked.

"I like him," she commented to Carson and Clark. "He has a sense of humor."

"He's a good man," Clark agreed. "Doesn't make up things. Works hard when you need him, takes time off when you don't."

"You pay your ops overtime?" Carson inquired.

"Sometimes," the detective replied, guardedly.

"Oh, OK, I'll stop minding your business for you. What you put on your tax returns is between you and your Maker."

"About this Williams business," Clark began, pointedly.

"Williams, Christophe. His wife's name is really Virginie?"

"According to the marriage license it is. Maiden name Christophe."

"H'm. The woman at the Crowncrest was supposedly Virginie Christophe."

"Oh, that's the connection. Well, the guy at the Crowncrest, from the description you gave me, showed up at the Williams house after hubby went off to work. Nine-ought-six to be exact. Various things happened inside the house and some interesting shadows and noises were observed until nine-thirty-two. At nine-forty Mr. Crowncrest pulled his car around to the back where Mrs. Williams ducked out the kitchen porch and joined him. They drove off toward downtown."

"Not out toward Santa Barbara."

"No, I don't think they were looking for hubby to join their little party."

"What was the car like?"

"Thirty-six Ford, dark blue, lots of ..."

"Chrome accessories," Carson supplied.

Clark looked surprised. "Right. Driving lights, a Klaxon, twin side-mounts. You know the car?"

"Same one at the Crowncrest," the lawyer explained.

"Ah, things come together for the master mind," commented the detective.

"Anyway, they proceeded to Central Avenue. Now Ricardo doesn't work that part of town so he had to stop on Fourth and call the office. I would have kept contact but the boys use their own judgment. By the time we got Pryor out there to take over the subjects had split up. Male subject was seen driving South. Dropped him, looked for female

subject, no luck. So that's it. Disappeared on Central but I don't think for ever and always."

"Anywhere near this dance hall, the High Life Club?" asked Carson.

"They could have gone there but we don't know," Clark responded.

"Pryor tried to get in but it's a private club, or that's what they said. He passed out a few dollars on the street and got some confirmation but nothing to bet your gold watch on."

"So it could be that Virginie Williams is still there?"

"Possible. With the ops I have I can't find out much in that part of town."

"Well, I have some connections," Carson claimed. "Maybe Trent will roust her out for me."

"She wanted?"

"Could be. I'll see if I can make her a material witness. Anyway, he'll be glad to chat with me."

"Don't get Selby involved, whatever you do. I can deal with Trent but the D.A.'s a real ... pain," Clark said, realizing a lady was present.

"He'll get the Feebies all worked up. Not that I really care, but I try to stay on good terms with people, my business being what it is."

"Yeah, I'll have to think about that. Do I want Virginie bad enough to tip my mitt?" the lawyer mused. "Carry me back to Old Virginny," he began singing, conversationally.

"Like you know, yourself. Hell, maybe you do. Anyway, that's the dope. You want us to keep on Mr. Williams?" Clark asked.

"Williams? What's he doing now?"

"As far as I know, putting in his time at Hughes Aircraft out in Santa Barbara," Clark admitted. "After I told Bert to come in and report I didn't think I had to send out a relief."

"So the Feds have somebody out there and you don't?"

"I can send a man in fifteen minutes if you think it's necessary. Your instructions were to find out who was tailing him and it turned out it was the Feds," Clark reminded him.

"Right, Phil, I don't think Mr. Williams is important anymore. His wife is playing around with Christophe, or whomever, and that's the connection with the Central Avenue killing. Tell you what. Run somebody out there at quitting time and see who tails him home. Should be the Feebies and you. If somebody's making a fourth in the procession they should be easy to spot," Carson suggested.

"The Feds won't like that," the detective complained.

"So keep out of their sight. Your op can manage that, can't he? He'll be watching the tails, not the subject."

"Yeah, those suits are easy to spot," Clark allowed. "Just take him to his house, right?"

"Oh, hang around an hour or so. See if anybody comes calling."

"And if they do?"

"Get a description and stop. We can't do much investigation with the G-men hanging around, not unofficially. May have to call Trent," Carson concluded.

"OK, I'll put Ricardo on it. He has to fill out his shift anyway. Call you tomorrow with the report," Clark said.

"Good enough, Phil," the lawyer acknowledged as he turned away.

"Tip your mitt?" Adele inquired as they walked to the parking lot.

"How does Mrs. Williams fit in?"

"I have no idea. But did you think I'd let Phil know that? I'm the /master mind/ to him. Can't ruin a young man's illusions," Carson claimed.

"But she may be in danger!" Adele exclaimed. "One person has been killed there ..." she trailed off.

"Right," Carson observed. "One person who wasn't really her husband. There's some connection but we don't know what. In fact, given that the Crowncrest guy took her there, she's more likely to be in with the murderers, assuming there was a reason for the killing and not just robbery or a fight. Anyway, she went there voluntarily. If she did go there. We just know she was heading to Central Avenue. We can't keep tabs on everybody. Especially considering that we don't have a retainer in this case and not even a client. So ..."

"Well, this is the way I see it ..." she persevered.

"Please, Adele," he stopped her, raising his hand. "I'll want your angle on it later, but right now I can't even begin to fit things together. That bit about calling Lieutenant Trent was just a stall. No, let's get on with the traction case, instead."

They went back to the office.

VIII.

Earl Carson spent the next day in court, countering the arguments



and precedents advanced by the streetcar company's attorneys. As he remarked to Adele, the company lawyers always tried the same tricks, even though they knew they wouldn't work against anybody who'd tried even a few of these cases. "And this makes a hundred for me, doesn't it?" he exaggerated. At the close of the session the case was ready for the closing arguments, for which two days were allotted.

Swinging by the office before going home, the two found Clark's report on Mr. Williams: nobody except the F.B.I. men followed him home from work and nobody but his wife met him there. There was also a message from Joe Petralli, who had brought the information that Link was /sure/ he was being followed. "Somehow I don't think it would help his peace of mind to tell him it's just the F.B.I.," Carson commented. "Let's put it off until tomorrow." Adele frowned, but only briefly. They went out for dinner and dancing afterward.

The next day, before he set out for the Civil Court, the lawyer called Phil Clark into confutation. "This business with the Feebies and Link Williams is a problem," he began. "I can't tell Link that the Feds are trailing him, because that is definitely obstruction of a Federal agent. There's case law on it. But he has asked me as his lawyer to find out what's up, and I can't just stall him off and keep my reputation, much less my self-respect."

"Uh, do you /know/ that this Joe Petralli is acting as his agent?" Clark suggested.

"Well, I don't see why not," Carson replied. "And I have to talk to Link anyway, so I can clear that up first thing. The problem is where and how."

"You have to ditch the Feds before you talk to a client?"

"They can make it look like I'm wising him up to the tail. Hell, I would be, too."

"Bert had an idea on that," Clark said. "He thought that business in the cafeteria was pretty smart and he figured that you were gonna have to contact Williams some time. What he said was why not pull the same stunt again. Get Williams and the Feebies together for a frank talk. They wouldn't talk, of course, but you could spill the whole thing and they couldn't kick."

"Now that is rich," Carson grinned. "I'd introduce him to the agents and then he could spot them, what with those clothes they wear. I wouldn't have to say a word more." He continued, after a moment: "But what do you think about Plan A. One of your ops, Humphreys if he's available, goes out and brings him in. While doing that, he kinda casually points out the Feebies and talks in a general way about what they're doing and how, generally speaking, they do it. Then all I have to do is find out if Link knows why they're on his case."

"Nix, nix," Clark insisted. "You don't sluff off your law-breaking

on my guys. You tell your client this general stuff so if the Feebies don't like it they'll get after /you/."

"OK, Phil," the lawyer conceded. "If you don't want the job, fine. I'll go get him myself. No, I'll be in court all day. Send somebody out there, will you, and see if Link can get here after work. I'll stick around until six o'clock."

"Why not just call him?" the detective countered.

"Because my phone is tapped."

"They'll spot him anyway."

Carson snorted. "I want it to be a surprise."

"OK, OK," the detective conceded. "One op out to Hughes in Santa Barbara to rope in a client. I'll leave word with Gertie how it works out. Oh, one more thing. Check in with me when you get back from court, will you?"

"Sure, Phil," said the lawyer. "Mind telling me why?"

"Just an idea I had," the detective answered, casually.

"Hah," Carson snorted.

"Good luck in the Halls of Justice," Clark smiled, getting up to go. They shook hands and he left.

IX.

At the end of the business day, elated with the success of his closing statement for plaintiff, Earl pushed thorough the rotating door to his office building and started across the speckled marble floor to the elevators. At the back of the lobby two men in identical black suits were arguing with the building manager. All three looked up when they saw Carson.

Beaming with good-nature, he walked over to them. "Mr. Ames again!" he said cheerfully. "Come on up, won't you? It's all right, Angelo," he told the building manager. "These are Federal agents working with me on a case."

"The Hell we ..." Ames started to protest but thought better of it. He motioned to his companion and they went with Carson to the elevator. "Now isn't this what you're looking for, Ames," the lawyer asked as they went up, "cooperation from the citizens?" The agent snorted in disgust.

They followed the lawyer into his office. Adele looked up, started to speak, then stopped as the G-men came in. From the chair beside the door, a man stood up and heartily shook Carson's hand. "Man, am

I glad to see you," he said, emphatically.

"Mr. Williams, I'd like you to meet F.B.I. Agents Ames and ... what was your name?" the lawyer asked the other one.

The other agent looked to Ames for instructions. "We'll skip the introductions, Carson," he said.

"I seen these guys before," Williams slowly realized. "This one was in that black car behind me yesterday -- and I've seen the other one on the street. Yeah, he was nosing around on the street I live on."

"Guess he didn't get much, did he, Link?" Carson smiled.

"Nope. We kinda don't talk about each other to strangers."

"These are F.B.I. agents," the lawyer repeated. A pause ensued.

"I'll get you, Carson," Ames said with suppressed fury. "Let's get out of here," he snapped to his companion and the two pushed out the door.

"They're the ones been following me?" Williams asked.

Carson carefully opened the outer door and watched the men step into the elevator halfway down the corridor. When the car disappeared, he shut the door and replied: "Don't know, Link. You're the one that can answer that question. In fact, it would be a criminal offense for me to say so. But I will say that all those F.B.I. men dress alike. Anybody looking like that in Los Angeles will probably be working for J. Edgar Hoover. Ring Phil, will you, Adele, and tell him we're back," the lawyer requested. She did so. After a minute the detective entered. "Let's go in and talk about this," Carson proposed.

However, when the three had taken seats at the lawyer's desk, Clark signaled for silence and started unscrewing the telephone receiver. A black disk fell out. He put it back and reassembled the instrument. "It's clean," he commented. "Ever see one of these?" he asked, pulling a small black object, rectangular and about three-eighths of an inch long with two short copper leads attached, from his inner jacket pocket.

Carson looked at it and passed it over to Williams. "It's a bug," the detective explained. "Found it in Gertie's handset this afternoon. Best and newest F.B.I. model. They call it the infinity transmitter. What it does is transmit over the telephone lines even when the phone is hung up. They dial your number, give a special whistle, and the bug starts transmitting. The phone doesn't even ring."

"You mean they were listening to everything I've said in here since this business started?" Carson exclaimed.

"No, it doesn't work past the switchboard. To bug an extension they have to get a call to the extension and give that whistle. Even then,

when the operator unplugs the call it cuts off the bug. Gertie says she hasn't heard anything weird like that going on. Have you got any phone calls with strange noises recently?" Clark replied.

"Not for months."

"You're clean, then."

"What if they dropped a bug when they were in the outer office just now?"

"They were up here?"

"Yeah, sort of Plan B modified," the lawyer affirmed.

"You need to get your office swept," Clark shook his head. "And I can't do it this late in the day. My advice is to take off and transact your business somewhere else. I'll sweep the place tomorrow morning."

"You heard the man," Carson commented to his client. "Let's do the cafeteria trick again. You know, this used to be a free country."

"I could use something to eat," Williams said.

"The Milestone's pretty good. Coming along, Phil?"

"No, Earl. I try not to hear lawyer-client conferences."

"Good man," Carson replied. Adele also declined, so the two walked to the cafeteria alone, Williams looking backwards for black-suited shadows.

"What have you been doing to get the Feds on your trail?" the lawyer leaned forward and asked when the two had filled their trays and taken a small table in the back corner. The busboys pushing rattling dish-carts in and out the adjacent swinging door added to the racket.

"It's my wife," Williams explained. "She's not really my wife, she's married to a big Haitian politician. His name is Dessalines but I've never met him."

"But you married her! I've seen the license myself!" Carson protested.

"That's the only way I could get her in the country. Things got real bad there, man. Had to do it!" Williams claimed.

Carson shook his head and took a swig of coffee. "How are the Feds concerned about some politics in Haiti?" he resumed.

"The revolution starts here, that's why," Williams replied. "The real war for independence. The big people over there want to keep things in the family, have a army revolt every five or six years and empty the treasury when they leave. Steal all the money. Kill anybody who's

not in on it and wants a real democracy." He took a moment to collect himself. "So the real patriots are here in the U.S. Have to be. But the bastards in Port-au-Prince try to make them out as Anarchists and Communists. So they get harassed by the F.B.I. Our Gestapo."

"I don't like that word, Link. I saw the real Gestapo over in Europe. The Feds aren't anything like that," Carson slowly said.

"Well, maybe they aren't. But they do political police work for the big shots in Washington."

"They're not supposed to be political."

"But they are. Why else are they following me?"

"Well, there is another possible reason, and that is Octave Hippolyte Christophe, recently deceased at the High Life Club on Central Avenue. What do you know about him?" the lawyer demanded.

Williams looked down and toyed with his food. "Virginie brought him to my house," he at last said. "Said he was a /revolutionnaire/ and we had to hide him. He stayed with us for two days. Virginie went out with him; she said I shouldn't take the risk. Then his brother took him away. The same day he was murdered. They want his belongings. Suitcase, clothes, toiletries, papers. A suitcase full of papers. I hid them. She says we have to make a bargain with them."

"Give them up in return for a promise of immunity?" the lawyer inquired.

"I guess."

"And who are these people who want the papers?"

"His brother is the only one I've talked to. Virginie says they are a patriot group in New Orleans that Christophe was going to betray."

"So now he's a stool pigeon, not a revolutionary."

"A traitor -- from what they say."

"Well, I don't think we need to get messed up with a bunch of politics," the lawyer said, heavily. What a mess it is, he thought. "What happened is that Octave Hippolyte was killed in the City and County of Los Angeles and you have information about the crime. You are being threatened because of that knowledge, right?"

"Knowledge? I don't know one damn thing about the murder."

"You know the motive and one of the parties, Christophe's brother," Carson replied, thinking that Williams' bigamous wife was another. "You have personal effects and papers belonging to the deceased. Under law, you have to give them to the Public Administrator."

Williams thought a moment. "Nix," he replied. "They've already killed somebody over those papers. I'm not going to hand them over to the bastards."

The lawyer was impressed by this evidence of moral discrimination, or perhaps bull-headedness. "I can't advise you to destroy any papers belonging to the deceased," he said. "But I think you could figure out a way for them to disappear. Some of them, I mean. Nobody has a list of this incriminating stuff, do they?"

"I don't know," Williams said, despairingly. "I don't know."

"Hey, don't get all broken up," Carson chided. "Those bastards in Haiti can't get at a U.S. citizen. And the funny thing is," he chuckled, drawing a strained glance from across the table, "a marriage in a foreign jurisdiction doesn't count in California unless there's a treaty to that effect between the foreign country and the U.S.A. And somehow I doubt that Haiti has taken the trouble to make such a treaty. So in this State you're Virginie's one and only husband. That's the case law about Chinese plural marriages. If a Chinese becomes a naturalized citizen he or she isn't bound to any of the Chinese spouses. None of them gets in. But Virginie gets in because she married one, count them, one, U.S. citizen. Doesn't matter how many husbands she has on the string in Haiti." /Bisandrous/, he thought, not /bigamous/.

He took out a cigarette and lit it. Puffing, he resumed: "So the next thing to do is get you cleared in this murder. Go downtown, tell what you know. Get police protection as a material witness. Round up these political people if they cause you trouble. Nothing to it."

The black man stared at his dinner tray. A thought occurred to Carson. "Are you a /revolutionnaire/, if that's what you call it?" he asked.

"Me?" Williams was surprised. "Sure, I'd like to see them get rid of those bastards but it's not my country. I'm all-American," he said, emphatically. "Don't make any mistake about that."

"Good, good," soothed the lawyer. Not the shiny black Haitian color. Doesn't mean he's mixed-blood but he probably is, being an American citizen. Just like the rest of us. "How long will it take you to take care of those papers?"

"Tonight. I'll do it tonight."

"OK. Be at my office bright and early tomorrow. Nine o'clock. We'll go see Lieutenant Trent and get square with the police." He rose and Williams followed him out the door. "I'm going back to my office," he informed him. "The Red Cars go out where you live, don't they?"

Williams nodded, still deep in thought.

"OK, see you tomorrow. Be careful!" As Williams gave him an apprehensive look, he explained: "Those streetcars can be dangerous."

I'm getting a big settlement for a broken hip suffered on one. You might want to take a cab, instead."

He did.

X.

Earl Carson came to his office early, to find Phil Clark and two others inspecting every square inch of the carpet, walls, and ceiling. "They've found six paper clips and two hairpins so far," Adele informed him.

"No pennies?" the lawyer said, disappointed.

"Not on this carpet," she retorted. True, it was bright blue with a woven, glassy surface, unlikely to conceal coins. One of the new, durable synthetics. Sometimes the color against the birch paneling and office furniture bothered Carson and other times it struck him as modern and Scandinavian. Contemporary Style, that was the term.

"A couple of suspicious places," Clark informed him. "Next, we try the howl-around."

"The what?" asked Carson, taking the cue.

"Ken, here, has a tone generator in that box. You remember that weird-sounding thing they use in spook movies?"

"A theremin," supplied Adele.

"Yeah, that's it," agreed the detective. "Well, it can make a strong tone at any frequency you want. This one is controlled by a knob, turn it up for a higher pitch, down for lower. When you hit the right frequency, any microphone will resonate and actually make the same tone back at you. So you can hear where the mike is planted."

"Go to it!" Carson enthused.

"We'll try the middle-high range first," Ken explained. "I don't think they have a real big mike in here. They'd have to stick it between the studs and you would have noticed that." He flicked a toggle switch. A penetrating pure tone began and gradually increased. He slowly turned the knob and the frequency rose. The pitch went higher and higher. Adele said "Ouch!" and put her hands over her ears. Eventually the tone disappeared. "Gone above our hearing range," Ken explained, turning the machine off. "Now we'll try the low tones. Like he said, that would need a big, clumsy mike, but they still use old equipment sometimes." He adjusted the controls and flicked the switch again. The tone built up and then went lower and lower as he turned the knob the other direction. Suddenly a buzz answered.

"From your desk, Adele," Carson commented. "Been selling us out?" he chaffed.

"Earl!" she protested, over the increasing din.

"That is one sick mike," Ken asserted, approaching it gradually. The buzzing gained a clicking hiss which went faster and slower, giving a rolling-wave effect. "Pull out that center drawer, will you."

Adele hastened over and complied.

"It's right behind it, up against the back," the technician commented. He got down on the carpet inside the desk well. "Ah, now I see it." He shut off the tone generator, started working with a slim screwdriver he pulled from his shirt pocket. "Got it," he said, backing out and putting the device on the desk for the rest to see.

"That's Army issue," Clark asserted. "Off a field telephone."

"Right," Carson agreed. "Spent months talking into one just like it."

"But it's not connected to anything," Adele pointed out.

"Sure isn't," Ken agreed, getting back under the desk. "Those wires ... were hooked up over here. Got two extra ones in the telephone cable. Bare ends sticking out. Pretty darn crude. Let's take a look at your switchboard," he said, reappearing.

He strode across the room and with Clark's help swung the green crackle-finish cabinet out from against the wall. Getting down on his knees, he unscrewed the back and set it aside. "There's the cable," he murmured. "Where does it ... up here and ... what's this?"

"What's what?" Carson broke in.

"This extra plug," Ken answered, getting up and going around to the plugboard in front. "You got six instruments and seven plugs."

"Well, maybe they were planning to add one."

"Nope. This was made to bug the room. Pretty slick."

Everybody looked at the switchboard operator, Gertie. "Why, I don't know a thing about it," she flustered. "You know we don't have a phone in the law library now. I just thought it was another one you took out."

"Ever plug it in?" the lawyer asked.

"Why, no, Mr. Carson. Why would I ever do that?" she answered.

"The guy would call and ask for Extension Seven," Ken explained.

"Anybody ever do that?"



"No, sir. We don't have extension numbers here. You ask for whomever you want and I plug it in," she said, defensively.

"The night service is on Eight," the technician mused. "I'll bet there's a jumper ..." he said, ducking back behind the cabinet. "And there is," he finished. "That's how it works. Whenever you plug in the night service, that mike in Adele's desk is live."

"What the Hell for?" asked the lawyer. "Nobody's here at night."

"And the mike wasn't hooked up," Clark reminded them.

"Yeah, it doesn't make sense," Ken allowed. "The mike's on when Seven is plugged in, but you never did that. It's on the night service, but so what. It's a crappy mike in the first place and somebody unhooked it." He shook his head.

"Well, I've got to scoot over to the Hall," Carson said, looking up at the clock. "Finish up here and leave your report."

"And bill," contributed Clark.

"At least you can't put a lunch on the expense account this time," the lawyer countered. "I'm off to finish the traction case."

"Knock 'em dead," said Adele.

He winked at her and left.

XI.

As he sat listening to the lawyer for the Los Angeles Railway, the defendant, make his argument to the jury, a nagging thought distracted him. Usually Earl Carson could direct his whole attention to the lawsuit at hand, but like everybody else in the courtroom he was bored stiff with the opponent's oratory and couldn't keep concentrating on it. "Where is Link Williams?" was the question bothering him. He shook his head in annoyance.

The Judge seized on this diversion. "Mr. Carson?" he inquired.

"Your honor," Earl improvised, "these general assertions by counsel are, strictly speaking, not in evidence. Although his repeated statements that the prosperity of Los Angeles and its citizens depend entirely upon increasing profits accruing to the Railway Company are far from proven, I have not thought it necessary to object to them. However, in denigrating plaintiffs in general and characterizing them as gold-digging tramps he is now verging on the prejudicial. Perhaps Your Honor will direct him to confine his statements to the case before the Court and avoid these generalities, no matter how deeply he may believe in them."

Several of the jurors smiled. "Mr. Greenglass," the Judge said. "Please be more specific. We would be glad to hear your views on economic and political organization at some other time and in some other venue, but please confine yourself now to the issues of this action."

The other lawyer didn't even look at Carson, but took a glass of water and resumed his monotonous speech. He's speaking to his client, Carson realized. He's given up this verdict but the people who pay his fee want to get in this political bellyaching. Where the Hell is Link Williams? Why didn't he show up?

At long last the clock crept around to Noon and the court adjourned for lunch. Adele met him on the Hall of Justice steps and, naturally, the first thing he asked her was: "Heard from Williams?"

"No," she said. "Why would we hear from him?"

Of course she didn't know about his agreeing to come in and talk to the Police, the lawyer realized. No reason to let her know, he started to reflect, and then caught himself. She had to know his business to handle it intelligently, which she did with conspicuous success. More than he himself usually displayed. Meanwhile, they proceeded in the direction of lunch.

"Pietro's?" she suggested.

"I don't want something heavy," he dissented. "If they'd let me take a bottle of /vino/ back in the courtroom it would help a lot. Boy, does that Greenglass like to hear himself talk."

"What does the jury think about it?"

"They're as bored as I am. We've got the verdict in the bag. Maybe he's hoping I'll drop dead or something if he talks long enough."

Adele stopped to look at the bill of fare of a hole-in-the-wall taco emporium. "Oh, no," Carson said, apprehensively. "None of your /salsa caliente/, young woman. Do you want me to be belching hot fumes all through the afternoon session?"

"You don't have to order it," she pointed out. "Have something nice and delicate. The beef guts, for example."

"What!" he exclaimed, feeling queasy already.

"Beef guts. See?" she pointed out. "/Tripas/ in Spanish. Maybe /tripe/ in English, too, but I kinda like that straightforward name for it."

"That's an idea. Give me something I can barf up during Greenglass' speech. Let the jury know what I think of his crap."

She stepped up to the window and ordered a thick burrito for herself

and a crisp quesadilla, mild, for her employer. "Drink this," she told him, handing him a blue beverage. "/Aguas frescas/."

It was delicious, blueberry flavored he concluded. They sat under an umbrella in the small courtyard niche off the sidewalk. "Adele," Carson began, "I expected Link Williams to come to the office this morning. What with Phil and his crew working on the place I just forgot about it. I'll need you to help me out by looking into it this afternoon while I'm in court."

"OK, what was he coming in for?"

"He knows a lot about the Christophe murder. There's a political angle his wife was involved in. So I talked him into going to Lieutenant Trent and telling him all about it."

"Well, you thought you did. Maybe he changed his mind," she suggested.

"Or maybe it got changed for him," he replied, not liking the idea at all. "You know, we'd better do this right and not go snooping around ourselves."

"Phil?" she suggested.

"Yep," he nodded. "Get him to locate Williams. If he's agreeable, have the op bring him to the office. You listen to his story and if it's OK you take him over to Trent. I think it would show confidence in both of them if I didn't attend their interview."

"That'll surprise him, all right. Trent told me a few weeks ago that he'd got you just about figured out."

"And did you agree with him?"

"Kinda. But I told him I've been working for you six years now and I can't guess what you're doing from one day to the next."

"What I'm doing this afternoon is getting bored to death and then collecting one hundred and sixteen thousand dollars for my client. I think we can predict that with a fair amount of certainty."

"Well, yes, that kind of money will keep you sitting in one place," she smirked at him. "You really want me to just send Link over to Headquarters all by his lonesome?"

"Sure. It's a grandstand for Trent's benefit, but I don't see what damage he can do. Maybe because I don't know what he's been up to so far today. There were some papers he wanted to get rid of. Hell, I'd better talk to him myself, first. If Phil can run him down." The qualifications made him more and more gloomy.

"Perk up, grouchface," she responded. "You'll find he's solved the Christophe murder and put the bad guys in jail and earned you the

Good Conduct Medal of the Haitian Citizens' League. On top of the bunch of money you're going to collect in the traction case. One hundred and sixteen thousand dollars. Repeat after me. One hundred and sixteen thousand dollars. One hundred and sixteen thousand dollars."

Carson joined in the low chant, which indeed made him feel better. "OK, kid," he told her. "I'm back to the Halls of Justice, to endure four more hours of Greenglass on Malingering Plaintiffs. You get Phil to find Link Williams. If he does, have him waiting for me at five o'clock. Don't let him go talk to the cops by himself; we've got to find out why he didn't show this morning. But don't tie him up and put him in the closet. If he insists on going, let him go then call Trent and, well, tell him I sent him over. Not that he'll believe it. Guess you'll have to stick around the office until Williams gets there. Got it?"

"Got it," she replied. "Want to bet that the cops already have him?"

His face fell. "There you are, lousing things up again with your realism. If Phil discovers that's what happened, run over to the Hall and let me know."

"Will do," she replied. "At least we'll find out /something/. How much is your cut of one hundred and sixteen thousand dollars?"

"Twenty percent."

"Twenty-three thousand five hundred. Do the Court fees come out of your slice or the client's?"

"Pro rata. Say an even twenty-three thousand. We can get by a while on that."

She assumed a dreamy expression. "Beverly Hills," she mused. "Swimming pools ... movie stars ... parties ... shops on Rodeo Drive ..."

"Income tax, more like," he countered. "Us poor working folk have to support our Federal government. Let's get to it. Up and at 'em!"

She also stood, gave him a kiss, and they separated, she back to the office on Third Street and he to the Hall.

XII.

"One hundred and sixteen thousand dollars," he announced as he entered his office at five o'clock, "plus costs!"

Adele hugged him. Gertie and the typist looked gratified.

"Now we'll go over to L.A. General and let Mrs. Wheeler know. Get some money out of the safe, will you," he directed his secretary.

"Better pay some on account."

"Five hundred?" she suggested.

"That's about right. She's run up three in expenses and she'll want some pin money."

"Is the hospital cashier open after five?"

"Drat. Get out a hundred in small bills and take the checkbook along. We'll leave a check if they'll let us know for how much."

"I expect they will. Are we coming back here?"

"No, might as well close up." Hearing this, the other two started putting things away and reaching for their coats. "Hold on a minute," Carson said. "Where's Link Williams?"

"No contact yet or so Phil says," Adele informed him.

"Lord, we can't just sit around waiting for the missing Link to show up," the lawyer said. "Close up," he continued. "We'll check back with Phil after we give the good news to Mrs. Wheeler. Fill me in on what he's dug up while we're on the way," he told Adele. The four of them took their coats and hats and, leaving, Carson turned off the lights and locked the door.

As they drove north on Olive, Adele echoed, "The missing Link," in a pained voice then fell silent. Finally Carson prompted her: "Give."

"There's not much," she claimed. "He's not at work but he scheduled a day off. He's not at his house. His car isn't there and neither is his wife."

He mulled over this information a while. "Too deep for me," he commented. "Could be he's skipped town instead of going to the cops with what he knows about the murder. Could be he went to the beach to appraise his wife in a bathing suit, instead. I know which I'd do. That nice brown might show through a white shark-skin. In spots," he added thoughtfully. "Just the right spots. Two of them, black."

"Didn't you say his so-called wife is really somebody else's?"

"Yes, but that wouldn't stop some people. Quite a few young wives spend a lot of time at the beach, flirting."

"Harken to the voice of experience," Adele responded. "What if he has a real wife in a bungalow out on Twenty-Fourth Street?"

"Then he's in trouble with the law. Not only does he have a marriage on record with Virginie, they've been telling the neighbors they're man and wife. Bet quite a few people could get testify to their being common-law spouses."

"No, now that I think of it they wouldn't let her in that neighborhood. Link would have to go over at least as far as Watts."

"Not if she's white, herself. No reason a good-looking, steady-working black man like Link Williams can't get himself a broad-minded Caucasian broad. I mean, this is California."

"They'd run him out with a shotgun first time he showed his face there. Mixed couples have to live in colored neighborhoods unless they're filthy rich," she observed.

"I don't know why we're yakking about his domestic arrangements," he complained as he swung the Lincoln into the Hospital parking lot. "He could be holed up in the Keymont Hotel on a three-day drunk for all I care. Now let's go spread some sweetness and light and a goodly sum of folding money," he proposed as he parked the car.

After they had notified Mrs. Wheeler of her victory in the traction suit and paid her account with the Hospital to date they paused, leaving the building, to savor the twilight. Earl was fidgety, as Adele noticed. She asked him: "Still worried about Williams?"

"Well, I should at least call Phil," he conceded.

"Phones over there," she pointed. He went and made the call. No news, she concluded, watching his expression as he returned.

"No news," he confirmed. "And that doesn't mean good news."

"I thought he was holed up in a cheap hotel," she teased.

"Yeah, that could explain it," he replied, seriously. "Can't expect Phil to check every one. Must be hundreds," he mused. "Do you think there are a thousand hotels in L.A.?" he asked Adele.

She considered the question. "That would be one for every three thousand people," she pointed out. "Not too many at all. Say one in thirty has a visitor to park, that makes one hundred per hotel every day. Sure, a thousand hotels could stay in business here."

"Not counting the residential ones," he agreed. "You know, like the Acme down at the beach. Lord," he shook his head, "why do people live like that?"

"I sure couldn't. But some people don't mind."

"They used to say that about the shacks in Georgia, out in the boonies. Claimed the po' whites and Negroes felt just fine because they didn't know anything better. Of course, that means you shouldn't give them anything better 'cause that would make them dissatisfied."

"Well, I hope being in the Army taught them to be clean," she observed. "You don't need a lot of house in a warm climate. Like Sunny Mexico."

That last trip we took did bother me, though. All those ragged kids. Was it always like that?" she asked him.

"No, they were better off back in the Twenties, or at least I remember it that way," he replied, absently. "You saw some real impressive places in Tia Juana."

"Those kind of places have to put up a front."

He looked at her wryly. "I see you know all about them," he alleged. "I meant the private houses. I mean /homes/."

They watched the sun disappear into the ocean. She drew close and he put his arm around her as the birds ended their nightfall songs. "Let's forget about business for tonight," she softly asked. They did.

XIII.

"No appointments?" Carson asked her next day at the office.

"None," she replied. "Not a one. We've hit a dry spell, a recession, slack times in the law business, a drought of contested lawsuits. We'll all be looking for washing to take in if this keeps up."

"Impossible," he snorted. "I can't make a living washing undies. It is just not possible that out of all those people out there," he rose and went to the window, "there is not one who desires my expert and proven services. Take that streetcar, for example," he said, peering more closely. "It's about to run down that ... nope, missed it."

"Advertising," she suggested. "Two for one sale."

"That's not ethical and you know it," he retorted. "You have to go under the table and pay off reporters to write you up in the news columns. Like that does any good. Brings in the kind of business that ties you in knots and skips paying the bill."

"Might as well be a /knotty/ attorney as a /naughty/ one," she punned.

He looked up, puzzled. She spelled it out. He bowed his head between his elbows on the desk.

"Now that you're in a good mood I have something to bring up," she ventured.

He looked at her inquiringly.

"There's the Christophe business. Link Williams is still missing."

"But he's the client and the next step is up to him. /He's/ the one who decided to disappear. Do we have a retainer from him, anyway?"

"No," she answered. "The policy of the office is not to require

retainers from previous clients who are not deadbeats. And how do you know /he's/ the one who made that decision?" she queried.

The doubt had obviously occurred to the lawyer, too. "Get Phil in here," he conceded. "Might as well stir him up a bit. And what about that microphone? Tell him to give us the dope on it, too."

She walked out to fetch the detective.

"Nothing, Earl," he disclaimed when he had seated himself in Carson's inner office. "Not at work, nobody at his house, doesn't show up in the police blotter or hospital admissions. Nobody knows where he is."

"The Feds were following him. Did he shake them, too?" the lawyer asked.

"How would I know?" Clark replied. "They aren't on his back trail. That could mean they've got him, still, or they gave up long ago. They don't confide in me and my ops."

"Well, that's something. If Link was really in trouble they'd be running around with their heads cut off. Is he AWOL from Hughes or is he on a legit vacation?"

"Can't tell. That place is run like a military base. We could get the info if we have to. It would cost money," the detective informed him.

"And who would we charge that to? Williams himself?" Carson asked rhetorically.

"Who's paying for it now is what I would like to know," Adele interjected. "I just assumed Phil's charges go on the Williams account."

"It is, until something else comes up," the lawyer claimed. Adele showed her disapproval by her expression. "Like I said a long time ago," Carson continued, "he is a material witness. I bet the cops could roust him out of wherever he's hiding. The question is, do I want to sic them on him? I mean, he /is/ a client."

"What if he's just up in Oregon on a fishing trip? Hell of a way to shake up a guy," Phil observed. "Is there some reason to get ahold of him? Right now, I mean. We're not going real strong on this because you didn't say we have to."

"I can tell that from the results," Carson said with a frown. The phone rang once. "Yes, Gertie," he picked it up and said, "Send him in. We will now have all made plain to us, and at no charge," he announced, with considerable satisfaction.

Joe Petrali stuck his head in the door. "Come in, come in," the lawyer invited him. "Phil, get up and give him the good chair." There was a bit of awkwardness as the motorcyclist indicated his unwillingness to deprive the detective of his seat and the latter gestured him to take it. When the visitor was seated, Carson asked him, smiling, "Well,



where's Link?"

"Where's Link?" Petrali repeated, blankly. The others' expectant expressions faded. "How the Hell would I know? Excuse my French, Miss," he apologized to Adele. Silence ensued.

"He didn't send you here?" Carson finally asked.

"Nope. Not today, I mean," Petrali qualified. "Haven't seen him in two days."

"Is he off work?" Clark inquired.

"Nope, and that's why I came up here. Mr. Hughes himself asked me and I couldn't tell him, so I thought you folks would know. You don't?"

"We don't," the lawyer answered, "and it's getting me worried. Phil, here," the detective nodded to Petrali, "has been trying to locate him. No joy."

The phone rang again. "Yes, he's here," Carson told Gertie. He handed the phone to his visitor. "For you."

"Yessir," Petrali replied to the thin, barely audible voice. "No sir, they don't know. There's a detective here who says he don't know. Yessir. Hold on a sec." He handed the phone back to the lawyer, saying "Talk to him. Give him the dope."

Carson took the phone and brought it to his ear. "Hello," he said. "With whom am I speaking?"

"Howard Hughes," the caller responded. "You don't know where Link Williams is?"

"No, but then a lot of people don't. Did he have today off?"

"Certainly not. We're in the final day of the Hercules project and I need him for the engines. One of them's short on power and I don't want to pull eighty-six spark plugs."

"He's an expert on those turbo-compounds?"

"The only person I know who can fix the ignition without going back to Square One. What's he doing that requires a lawyer's services?"

"Well, seeing that you are his employer, I can tell you that he's a material witness in a recent murder case. The innocent-bystander kind of witness."

"Are you his attorney?"

"Yes."

"Then I can, and will, tell you that he has been under F.B.I. surveillance for the past two weeks. George Breel is the Agent in Charge. He just told me that they lost him, too, two days ago. Specifically, after he left your company. Seems you took him to a downtown cafeteria for dinner."

"I did. Shook off the Feebies all by himself, did he?"

"/Feebies/? Oh, you mean F.B.I. agents. I'll have to remember that. No, he said it was a pretty slick operation, with two other cars and a decoy. He thought you had arranged it."

Carson laughed. "No, Mr. Hughes, I don't go around committing Federal felonies. I know Link is mixed up in some political mess out of Haiti, but what I told him was to come downtown the next day and tell the Police what he knows about this murder. It's an Haitian who got killed, by the way."

"Why that has to come up now I don't know," Hughes grouched. "You try to get something important accomplished and things like this happen, thousands of them. You don't happen to know any good Wright ignition mechanics, do you?"

"No," the lawyer replied, "but I do know one guy at Mohave Air Force Base. He was flying -- well, I'd better not say what it was, but it uses big engines with contra-props. Those the same things?"

Petralli leaned forward so Hughes could hear him over the phone. "If it's a big prop plane out at Mohave I bet it's the Northrop bomber, Mr. Hughes. Same engines."

"Is it, Mr. Carson?" Hughes asked.

"About Northrop I don't know, but I do know it's a weird-looking big airplane," the lawyer hedged. "The guy's name is Glenn Edwards. He's a test pilot but he knows all the mechanics out there."

"Yes, but they scrapped the recipis and installed eight turbojets," the millionaire airman informed him. "Still, it's a thought. I call the base commander up and see if his people can help."

"Need the number?" Carson asked, gesturing to Adele.

"My secretary has it," Hughes assured him. "About Link Williams," he continued. "Find him. I'll call George Breel and instruct him to co-operate with your detective. What is his name?"

"Phil Clark. The Clark Detective Agency on Third Street."

"Got that?" Hughes asked somebody on the other end. "Have him check in with Stanfield, my Security boss, sometime today," he resumed. "I don't like this Haiti business but I'll leave it to you. We're going to taxi the Hercules tomorrow if I can get the ignition straightened out."

"Good work!" Carson said. "I'll send out Williams as soon as Phil finds him."

"Phil. Your detective, right. Good." Machinery noises rose in the background, stopped, and were replaced by yelling. "I've got to get back to work," Hughes said. "Good-bye." He hung up the phone.

"So we now have a paying client?" Adele inquired.

"Indeed we do," the lawyer answered, grinning. "The richest man in Southern California unless you think Hearst Castle is in Southern California. And you, sir, Mr. Detective Clark, are going to enjoy the co-operation of the F.B.I."

Clark looked stunned. "I have to work with those guys?" he faltered.

"They'll be working with you," Carson swept his arm in an inclusive circle. "Agent in Charge Breel will be consulting your every wish."

"Hell!" the detective said, meditatively.

Joe Petrali rose. "Well, if you've got that figured out I might as well get back to the shop," he said. "Didn't think Mr. Hughes would call, himself, but he's a take-charge kind of guy. Anything else I can tell you?" he asked Carson. Carson relayed the question to Clark with a glance. "Yeah," the detective slowly responded. "Let's get some dope on his habits and acquaintances. Come on down the hall to my office." The two left, Petrali sort of bowing to Earl and Adele at the door.

"This should be interesting," he commented to her after considering the matter a while. "Wish I had been nicer to the Feebies."

"I don't think they're going to be real enthusiastic about it, anyway," she observed.

"If they do find him I'll be surprised. Maybe Phil by himself will do it, but the G-men will just be in the way. Don't think I could have left them out, though, and it should be instructive for him."

"Do you think Link got kidnapped? That's a Federal offense."

"Yes, but ... hold on!" he exclaimed. "Hughes told me the Feds had been trailing Williams for /two weeks/! That has to be the Haitian angle. Nobody was murdered two weeks ago!"

"Speaking of which ..." she hesitated.

"What?"

"The murder. He is a material witness, right?"

"From what he said, yes."

"So when are you going to notify Trent? If he hears about from the Feds he's gonna be awful sore at you."

"I don't /know/ that's he's a material witness, Adele. He could just be giving me a line," Carson asserted.

"You don't believe that one minute," she replied.

"No, I don't," he admitted. "And it's a pretty weak dodge in the first place. Strictly speaking, the information is privileged. If he tells me about an undisclosed crime I don't have to reveal it if it would implicate him. The self-incrimination right, applied to me as his agent. I can advise him to fess up and resign the case if he doesn't but it's his decision. The problem is, we can't get his decision because we can't find him. He may not want us to reveal his knowledge of all this political stuff even though Trent will hear about it from the Feds. It may incriminate him as an accessory. If it's his wife -- or whomever's wife -- he's protecting ..." he trailed off.

"If it is?" Adele prompted.

"He may be protecting himself, as well, against self-incrimination as I already said. No, Adele, we have to talk to him first. Let Trent get as sore as a bear, our duty is to our client. /Fiat justitia, ruat coelum/, or /Trentum/ in this case."

"Is our client Howard Hughes, or Link Williams?"

"You would think of that," he complained. "We are engaged by Mr. Hughes to find Mr. Williams. We are engaged by Mr. Williams to find out who was tailing him. Were engaged. We've finished that job. Arising from it, however, we have another job in safeguarding his rights in respect to the Christophe murder and related problems. By the way, do we ask Hughes for a retainer?"

"He doubtless has an attorney already. Attorneys. For him, personally, and for Hughes Aircraft. Might be a good idea to find out which we're working for," she suggested.

"Actually, we're only his agent for hiring Phil Clark," he asserted.

"Not an attorney at all."

"In which case we don't get a retainer. In fact, we don't get a fee, either, unless by way of commission from Phil."

"Oh, well, let him keep his millions. Howard Hughes, I mean. He has a lot of expenses, what with all those Congressmen to buy and airplanes to build. He needs the money worse than I do," Carson opined.

"Liar," Adele retorted.

"Just being silly. Really, though, that would floor him. Make up a bill, will you, with No Charge as the amount."

"We don't know that yet. We're not at the billing stage anyway. And don't we need something in writing to show we're working for him?"

"No, his phone call is good enough as far as privilege is concerned. Keep my idea in mind. I really think we're going to write off Mr. Hughes' account just for the fun of it."

"As you like, Sir Boss. Just as long as you keep paying my salary," Adele said. "I'll set up a folder for him anyway." She went out to do that. He drummed his fingers on his desk for a while and then started reading the latest /Advance Decisions/.

XIV.

By closing time next day the only prospective clients who had appeared were a woman who had lost her suitcase at Union Station and wanted to sue the Southern Pacific for damages and a beauty-contest promoter who wanted a form of contract that would guarantee he wouldn't have to pay any of his own money to any contestant in any circumstances. Carson referred the first back to the Station for instruction in how to file a lost-baggage claim and restrained himself from kicking the second out of his office and along the corridor to the elevators. After these episodes he perused the Beverly Hills section of the real-estate ads, which section Adele had casually left in his swivel chair while he was out to lunch. However, the prices, when they were supplied, were no less forbidding on reading them a second and third time. There were no small houses in that city (a city of the sixth class, he recalled, Will Rogers having been elected its mayor once and the State Legislature having then decided that cities of that class didn't rate mayors) and certainly no bargains on long-vacant mansions, at least none advertised although he knew that such existed. Even with the post-war boom there were lots of people who just didn't want a house that required servants. Himself, for one. Who needs a house, anyway, he meditated. I don't hear too much through the walls at the apartment and there's no point in growing a garden when we get good, cheap vegetables in all the stores. He turned to the Out-of-County listings and considered mountain cabins in the San Gabriels. Drifting off into a light doze, he dreamed of making friends with a chipmunk in a sun-drenched pine-forest clearing. "Cluck-cluck-cluck," he said, crooking his finger invitingly, while the little striped creature looked with increasing trust into his eyes.

He opened them. Not a chipmunk, he sleepily recognized. In fact, it was the craggy Irish face of Police Lieutenant Ignatius X. Trent, framed below by a blue-uniform collar and topped with the regulation flat-crowned billed hat. "Cluck-cluck-cluck," he nevertheless continued.

"Been hitting that third drawer again?" asked the police officer.

Carson without a word opened the drawer and brought the four shot glasses

out for inspection. "Dry as dust," he pointed out.

"You can drink from a bottle," Trent excepted.

The lawyer brought the bottle out. "I'm on duty," the Lieutenant said. "I am too, come to think of it," Carson replied, and deliberately poured two shots of bourbon. He pushed one over to Trent, who refused it with a wave of his hand. Carson set his own drink aside. "You're on official business," he prompted his visitor.

"Yeah. We want Link Williams," Trent stated.

"So do I, so do the Feds, so does Howard Hughes. I've got Phil Clark working on finding him and if he does, I'll let you know," Carson said.

"Yeah," the officer repeated. "Are you his attorney?"

"For some things, maybe not for others," the lawyer answered. "Do you have a warrant for his arrest?"

"Yes," Trent replied. Carson showed his surprise. "As an accessory after the fact in the murder of Octave Christophe."

"/After/ the fact?"

"Don't ask me, ask Selby."

"More of his B. S.," the lawyer said, disgusted. "The Feds put him up to it."

"Now why would they do that?" asked Trent, with a foxy expression.

"They want you to pull him in before J. Edgar Hoover starts asking questions about how they screwed up and lost him," Carson asserted.

"Could be, could be," the Lieutenant allowed. "Could be we know some things about the Central Avenue killing that you don't."

"Could be that grass is magenta-colored. It is, you know, if you stare at it long enough and close your eyes. That's a pretty good metaphor, isn't it?" Carson chortled. "Going around with eyes closed and imagining things," he explained.

"Yeah," Trent commented. "Just tell me you'll bring him downtown as soon as you get him located. Otherwise I'll have to hang a tail on you."

"Used to be a free country," the lawyer said wistfully. "My idea is that he's dead."

Trent stared.

"All this flim-flam about ditching the Feebies is nothing he thought up. There's some clever S.O.B. behind this, somebody who thinks he's

clever. And he's killed one person already. No reason to stop. And I really don't think Link Williams would run out on the Hughes job, not when they're trying out the boat for the first time. Did they get it out and taxi it?" he asked the Lieutenant.

"Hughes? He flew the thing about half a mile. Then they turned around and hauled it back out of the water."

"Hardly worth the effort. I guess the idea was to prove that it /would/ fly."

"Don't ask me. What about Williams? You going to bring him in?"

"If he shows up I'll talk to him and turn him over. But don't hold your breath."

"Dead, huh?"

"Dead. Don't let on to Adele, will you? She gets kinda emotional."

"We don't /know/ he's deceased. Still, it makes sense. Explains why the F.B.I. can't find him after two days."

"Hah," Carson snorted. "Explains why Phil Clark can't find him after six hours. You gonna bring these Haitians in and feed them some rubber hose?"

"Tch, tch, Counselor," Trent replied. After a second, he got up. "Must be going," he said, and started to leave. At the door he turned and said, "For once I think you're right." Carson merely nodded. After his visitor shut the office door he reached for the glass he had set aside and drained it slowly but steadily. He looked at the door for several minutes. He noticed the Lieutenant's drink sitting on the other side of the desk. After a glance at the office washstand, tucked behind the coat closet, he picked up the other glass of bourbon and drank it, too.

XV.

Things settled down to a routine pace for Earl Carson, Attorney at Law, Advocacy--Injuries--Claims, as the plaque on the door described him. Phil Clark was unable to find Link Williams; Carson sent his report on to Howard Hughes and told the detective to bill Hughes directly. As expected, the F.B.I. made a show of co-operation but actually did nothing. The County officers followed what leads they had diligently but to no effect. Virginie Christophe had disappeared and the man at the Crowncrest, Hippolyte Christophe as he had called himself, also. The body of Octave Christophe, Consular Agent at New Orleans of the Republic of Haiti, was sent by rail to that city for his official colleagues to dispose of, no family members appearing in Los Angeles.

Adele Hall showed her dissatisfaction and anger whenever the case was

mentioned but had to agree that, logically, there was nothing Carson could do. "Can't you pull one of your surprises?" she asked, wistfully, one night when they were parked in a byway, watching the moon. "After all, you are the master mind, according to Phil. You don't want to make him a liar, do you?"

"He doesn't know /everything/," Carson differed. "Maybe something will come up. Trent doesn't like having a witness disappear on an unsolved homicide. The Feds have to be doing something." It was obvious he didn't place much faith in what he was saying. "I'm stumped, Adele, that's all there is to it. I'm pretty good at figuring out greed and petty revenge and jealousy as motives, but politics and revolutions and Haiti are beyond my experience. Maybe something will come up."

"Link wasn't Haitian," she wanted to say, but didn't. Instead she snuggled up closer to reassure him.

One day that Winter the lawyer was looking out his office window at the cold, slanting rain. Phil Clark stuck his head in the door and asked, "Got a minute?"

"Sure," Carson said, and turned back to his desk. The detective tossed a microphone on the blotter. "This belongs to you," he claimed.

"The one in Adele's desk," the lawyer recognized.

"Right. And, no, we haven't found out who planted it there."

"If it's abandoned property it belongs to the finder. Your man Ken."

"But he was acting as your agent."

"Not for the discovery of ... well, he was, wasn't he," Carson admitted. "So I now own a disconnected, obsolete field-telephone mike. Whoop."

"Ever consider bugging your own office?" Clark casually suggested. "Keep a record of everything your clients say. You could go back and find out their exact words, their tone of voice, their sputtering, coughing ..."

"You make it sound like a doctor's office," the lawyer complained. "No. You keep trying to sell me on that hidden recorder idea. Hell, no. I /don't/ want a record of what people tell me and what I tell them. Records can be subpoenaed."

"How 'bout a camera /and/ a recorder?" the detective continued, unabashed. "Evaluate their expressions, dress, gestures along with what they said and how they said it. And when somebody gets fed up and comes here and plugs you with a thirty-eight revolver we'll have a movie of him doing it."

"Back to this here microphone," Carson said severely. "You're trying



to cover up your failure on finding out about this one. And, now that I think of it, your failure to find my client Link Williams. Anything else you've screwed up for me recently?"

"You haven't given me any jobs recently," Clark retorted. "As for Link Williams, his disappearance is a Police matter. The County wants him as a material witness, the G-men have concluded he was kidnapped. Despite what Mr. Howard Hughes seems to think, no private agency is going to mess around with that kind of investigation. Not that we couldn't do a better job but they won't let us. As for the mike, I traced the wires, well, Ken did, and told you how they had been connected. There's nothing left to do on the investigative side. Maybe you can think over all the people who'd want to bug your office in that particular way but that's not detective work. Not my kind, anyway."

"At least the Feds removed their bug," the lawyer commented.

"Or put on a better one," Clark said.

"You mean I paid you to go over the place and they could still have me bugged?" Carson asked indignantly.

"Not /in/ your office," the detective explained, "but they could be listening to your phone calls anywhere from the junction box to the central office."

"Can you tell if they are?"

"Well," Phil hedged, "sometimes we can. Like when you could hear the echo. We put on a scope and send tones down the wire. If we see them flatten out that's a good sign there's a recorder somewhere. But you can't always be sure because Ma Bell has all sorts of junk they use. Like one time we told a customer that all his calls to one number out in Barstow were being tapped. We even told him it was a live stenographer doing it instead of an automatic recording device. Turned out it was the other people on the party line and the Central girl now and then. Not much excitement out there in the desert, I guess."

"Not nearly as much as in a big-time law office like this one," Carson replied sarcastically. "If J. Edgar's boys are actually listening to all the crap I get over the phone ... well, serves them right. But there's no way I can tell if they are?"

Phil gave him a pained look. "Oh, there are ways, but they constitute obstruction of justice, at least until you make sure there isn't any warrant for a wiretap." He paused for thought. "And unless you can make sure they don't fake one up after the fact," he added, significantly.

"Damned impossible," the lawyer agreed.

They sat for a while, listening to the rain.

"Even without a warrant," Clark continued, "they can listen to numbers

you dial. Count the clicks and write the numbers down. It's like they can copy the addresses off your mail as long as they don't open the envelope. And sometimes they forget to turn off the loudspeaker when you start talking and they hear the whole conversation. Purely by mistake, of course."

Carson picked up the detached microphone and toyed with it idly. He put it down, picked up the desk telephone and dialed Zero. "Gertie," he asked when the operator answered, "did anybody ever call and ask for that Extension Seven? You know, how that fake microphone was set up?" He nodded at her denial. "Thanks," he said and hung up.

"So that set-up never did work," Clark asserted.

"What about the night service? Ken said there was a jumper hooking it up there."

The detective thought a second. "So somebody calls after hours. He gets the night operator, who is in another building I guess. Right?"

Carson agreed. "In the secretarial service office across the street," he explained.

"So whoever is on the phone picks up the mike, too. The caller and the secretarial service girl."

"And she has to be in on it. She'll hear what's happening in my office. Which is nothing if it's after hours," the lawyer concluded in disgust. "Still doesn't make any sense."

"If it's after hours," Clark said slowly, thinking it out. "What if they're still connected when you come in in the morning?"

"Gertie unplugs the night service. That cuts off the people across the street. Does it hang up the call?" Carson wondered.

"I'll ask Ken," the detective volunteered. "He knows all about phones and switchboards. Could be that you've been bugged for a long, long time, considering how old that mike is."

"Lovely," the lawyer commented, looking out the window at the rain. Clark grinned and left.

"You're worried about something," Adele Hall commented when she brought in some papers to Carson halfway through the afternoon.

He looked up as if to disagree but instead nodded, tapping his fountain pen on the desktop. "One thing I didn't think of when Link Williams disappeared. What happened to his house? Did he own the place?"

"I'll look in our file and see," she replied, swiftly going back to the outer office. She brought in the folder, laid it on his desk,

and picked out the personal information sheet. "Rents it," she announced, "or at least he did back when I wrote this down. You know, that employment case two years ago."

"But he got a job with Hughes Aircraft. Pretty good one from what Hughes said, mechanic on his big seaplane. I'd be surprised if he didn't put down some money and get a mortgage from a savings-and-loan." Earl thought a moment. "Can we get title info over the phone? Hate to send somebody out in this rain."

"If we pay for it," Adele assured him. "We've got an account with Continental Title and they'll trace the mortgage if there is one."

"Do that, will you?" he requested. She left.

Fifteen minutes later she reappeared. "You're not going to like this," she cautioned him.

"Shoot," he told her.

"The house is owned by one Virginie Christophe. Has been for ten years. She has a fifteen-year mortgage on the place."

"Ten years! That's forever in this town. For that neighborhood."

"1938. Has Link been in L.A. that long?" Adele suggested.

"Look it up," Carson replied, although she was already looking through the file.

She shook her head. "No, he came out here in 1942. For war work, I guess."

"Shouldn't have to guess, Adele. Didn't you get his life story along with his retainer?"

She was irritated at the criticism. "No, we don't give our clients the third degree, not in civil business. I figured you'd tell me if we needed his work history, later."

He decided against pursuing the subject. "So Virginie owns the house. Is it the same Virginie? If so, where is she?" he asked nobody in particular.

"Last seen on Central Avenue, August 14th," Adele replied efficiently.

"Seen going there. No, check that, seen in a car there and not seen in the car when it left the neighborhood. That's circumstantial evidence about her whereabouts, not direct evidence."

"You're the lawyer," Adele commented, with a touch of sarcasm.

"But she has a perfectly good house ... well, a crappy little bungalow

house in West L.A. and she isn't living in it. Hell, we don't know that. I just assume Trent is keeping me posted and he isn't. What do I pay my taxes for if I can't count on the County cops doing my legwork for my lawyering business? C'mon, Adele, let's investigate the premises. I'm sick of sitting around here anyway." The two gathered their coats and hats, went down to the parking lot, and drove off westward on Fourth, jogging over to Second on Beaudry after passing Bunker Hill.

As the wipers squelched in the increasing rain, Carson commented: "That means Link lied to us. Or you got him wrong, which I don't believe you did. He said he rented the place when his wife actually owned it. Virginie, I mean."

"Oh, he could have just been covering up a messy situation, with him being married to somebody else's wife and all," Adele allowed. "Or she could have been charging him rent. I would have."

Carson pondered this in silence. "Here it is," he announced, and swung the Lincoln in to the curb. As the motor purred the two looked at the little bungalow, painted slate gray and especially drab in the rain. A few children in bright raincoats lined up on the sidewalk and inspected the expensive car and its occupants. The curtains on the nearest window parted briefly and the lawyer and his secretary got a glimpse of a woman's face looking out at them.

"Black?" Carson asked Adele.

"Definitely," she answered.

"Is it Virginie?"

"Can't tell. I barely saw her, remember. At the Crowncrest, that is."

A tap on the car window startled Carson. He turned and saw a black man, the rain streaming down his face and soaking his sport jacket, leaning forward. The man's right hand was inside his lapel, he noticed. Nevertheless, Carson rolled down the window.

"May I assist you with directions?" the man offered.

The voice cinched it. "No, Monsieur Christophe, I believe we have found our destination." Carson couldn't help mimicking the stilted translated-French style, in pure malice. After all, this man had somehow evaded the F.B.I. and County Police, only to turn up at his presumed residence with a gun under his jacket.

He didn't pull the gun, although he was obviously thinking about it. "My name is not Christophe. It is Dessalines, Francois Dessalines. This is my home, and if it is a destination of business for you I require you to state that business."

"You don't get it?" the lawyer asked. Adele put her hand on his

right arm for reassurance and perhaps caution.

"Get it?"

Could he really have forgotten the meeting at the Crowncrest Tavern? Carson wondered. The murder and driving his wife -- that would explain some things -- to the scene of the crime the next day and leaving her there? Is he really a householder accosting a suspicious pair of characters out of place in this neighborhood, or a fugitive from justice, if you call the Feebies that, ready to wipe out a dangerous witness? Licking his suddenly dry lips, the lawyer said, "Guess you don't. We'll be moving along, then." He let out the clutch slowly. M. Dessalines stood in the downpour and watched them out of sight.

Carson kept driving west, toward the waterfront. The surrounding neighborhoods changed from working-class residential to half-vacant to light-industrial. They bumped across railroad spurs and went past long sheet-metal fences topped with spiral barbed wire. Neither he nor Adele spoke. At length they reached the Port of Los Angeles and parked overlooking the gray harbor.

"If he really is her husband that explains some things," he said, offering Adele a cigarette from his case and taking one himself. She gave him a light and let out a strong puff of smoke.

"That means Link was rooming there and the man Virginie was playing around with was her husband," she concluded. "And that Link was giving us another line about her being his wife."

The rain drummed on the car roof. "OK, so Virginie and -- what did he call himself?" Carson asked.

"Francois," Adele supplied.

"We have Francois and Virginie living there, for ten years according to the Title Company. But they told me, up at the Crowncrest, that they were just arrived in town and looking for a hotel and restaurant. Didn't know it would have to be a /colored/ hotel and restaurant because they lived in New Orleans which is not segregated. Is it?"

"Don't know. You'd think it would be, down in Louisiana. Did they actually tell you they were from New Orleans?" Adele asked.

He considered the question. "No, that's just my deduction from the cock-and-bull story they gave us. So forget that part. They were from L.A., right? They weren't the Christophes, they weren't looking for any hotel. Why did they tell me that? Why did they tell /me/?"

Adele didn't answer, but instead smoked her cigarette.

"Well, the connection is Link Williams. Notice I did not say that the /link/ is Williams."

"Thank you," Adele replied.

"He knew that I'm a trial lawyer, a damned good one and a bit of a sap," Carson continued.

"Bit of a trial, yes. Not a 'bit of a sap'."

He left the ambiguity. "A lawyer, anyway. So the couple at the Crowncrest were laying for me. But just that day? We go there a lot but not on any regular schedule, do we?"

"Why does it have to be any specific day?"

"Because of Octave Christophe getting killed that night. I assume they wanted to lure me down to Central."

"I don't get that," Adele dissented. "They were supposedly looking for a hotel. Sure, there are some on Central but not where you'd take any visitor. Any respectable visitor."

"But they wanted to get me out of the way, tourist-guiding them around. Link would know if they'd hooked up because I would call him for the info."

"But they lost us. Deliberately. They cut out their lights on the downgrade and never showed up later."

"We don't know that. Could have been accidental," Carson claimed. "We ducked into that art movie where nobody would guess we were."

"Blame it on /Oedipus Rex/, do you?" Adele mocked.

"No, get serious," he said. "The only way they knew me was through Williams. The fact they were using the name Christophe links them to the murder. So Williams is involved in it too. No wonder he's disappeared."

"Oh," Adele said, seriously. "Where does that leave us?"

He thought about it. "Well, I'm not going to go nosing around in West L.A. after a gun-toting Negro, no matter how respectable he is. Clark's no good in that part of town, either. Why the Hell didn't Trent find this out? There was a regular dragnet out after the Christophe killing and somehow they didn't turn up the woman at her house that she's been making payments on for ten years!"

"We don't know that they didn't," Adele responded.

"Right," Carson conceded. "The Feebies would hold out on me of course and Trent just might even if they didn't threaten him. But if they know all about it ... where is Link Williams?"

"Dead?" suggested Adele, shaken.

He didn't express his agreement. "Not if they haven't pulled in the Dessalines couple, if that's what they really are," he qualified.

"And we don't know they didn't do that."

"I'm going to have to have a little talk with Police Lieutenant Iggy Trent," Carson concluded. "Even if I don't get anything I'll know that much." He started the car. "Let's get some dinner," he proposed.

"Let's go to the Crowncrest," Adele suggested. "They never have any customers in bad weather and Joe will be glad to see us. Maybe some hidden memory will be jolted out of your subconscious and clear the whole thing up in a jiffy." She paused, thoughtfully. "But don't talk to any exotic strangers in the parking lot," she provided.

He agreed.

XVI.

Earl Carson and Adele Hall sat at their table beside the spacious picture window of the Crowncrest Tavern, set at the top of the ridge overlooking the glittering cities of Los Angeles, which, however, could not be seen through the steady moderate rain and resulting mists.

"Dammit, she had a marriage license," he suddenly exclaimed, putting down his fork.

"Virginie and Link?" Adele asked.

"Right. Phil said that, didn't he?" Adele nodded confirmation. "And he doesn't get things like that wrong or fill in fictional details like a lot of detectives do. He said Link Williams married Virginie Christophe. Now, Link told us that she'd previously married a Haitian politician. The consul murdered here was named Christophe and was presumably a politician. Did she put down her previous married name as her maiden name? What would you do in that situation? Give me the woman's angle, Adele," he requested.

"Definitely not if you're divorced," she replied. "You go back to using your maiden name for everything. If you're contracting a bigamous marriage ... well, I don't know that there's a standard usage for that."

"So she married Christophe, they separate but don't get a divorce -- I think they're all Catholics there -- she gets out of Haiti and he gets appointed Consul at New Orleans. He finds out that she's in Los Angeles, comes to get her, and ... "

"And her boyfriend kills him," Adele supplied.

"Right. That boyfriend being Frankie," Earl concluded.

"OK," Adele continued, "now tell me who put the F.B.I. on the trail. A week before the murder, remember."

"Well," he said, dubiously, "maybe they thought he was a Communist."

"You're just making that up. And the deceased had documentary evidence about the revolutionaries, according to Link, and was going to rat on them."

"She told him that to keep him quiet," Earl asserted. "Just like she told him Frankie was Octave's brother."

"But Link had the documents."

"We don't know that. He said she said they existed. He disappeared just when he was going to do something about them."

"You made it sound like he had them."

"Well, that's what it sounded like. But I didn't cross-examine him."

Adele thought a moment. "You know, there could be two Virginies. The one who owns the house could have nothing whatever to do with the murder and the revolutionaries."

This puzzled Earl. "You're saying the woman I saw here on the day of the murder was using the same name as the one who owns the house, was with the same man we just ran into out there, but wasn't the one peeping out the window curtain?"

"Could be," she said defensively. "He could have used her name just to mix things up. He needed a fake name and used the one he knew."

"Which just happened to be Christophe, just like the man he was going to murder. And Phil and the Feebies located her at Link's house the day after."

"We don't know that," she asserted. "I assume she met the description you gave him, but you know a lot of people could. This wouldn't be the first time he's trailed the wrong person. And how many names do they have in Haiti, anyway? Christophe could be like Smith or Jones."

"That's pretty thin," he commented and took a drink. "I think, honeybunch, that I'll continue working on the assumption that there is only one Virginie in the case. What I'd like to know is why Frankie is still out on the street, packing a gun. I'm going to bear down on Iggy Trent about that."

"Right," she said. "Even if he clams up you'll know what happened."

"Will I?" he asked, puzzled.



"Sure you will," she teased him. "The master mind sees all and knows all. If not we can get Mr. Amthor to look him up in his crystal ball."

"Amthor?" he asked, even more puzzled.

"Jules Amthor," she answered. "We were parked outside his place at the edge of Beverly Hills that night the black couple followed us from here. Or rather didn't follow us all the way. Mr. Amthor is knows all and sees all, or at least he claims to and makes a good business out of it."

"He's a detective?"

"No, goose. He's a fortune-teller. All the best people in Beverly Hills go to him."

He considered this information. "You've given me an idea," he began.

"Uh-oh."

"We'll take a good look going down the grade and see where that Ford could have disappeared to. You did see it turn out of the lot?"

"Sure did," Adele affirmed. "Saw it twisting around behind us for a while, too. Then -- presto, chango! -- no more Ford."

"I thought you said he was a fortune-teller, not a sleight-of-hand man."

"Right, they did the disappearing act by themselves." She suddenly grew thoughtful. "And arranged one for Link later," she suggested.

"We don't know that," Carson cautioned her. "Still, it's possible. Finished?" he asked her. She put down her empty glass and nodded. He pulled out her chair as she stood and they retrieved their coats, paid the check, and left the restaurant.

It was raining steadily but they had parked near the door. There was no moon; the rugged hilltop behind the Tavern was invisible. Carson switched on his high beams to find the steep downhill shortcut. He drove slowly. "Look to the right, Adele," he instructed her. "Sing out when you see a road or driveway."

She nodded, and they proceeded down the twisting two-lane blacktop.

A sudden burst of light flashed in the rear-view mirror. "Damn," commented Carson. "Nearly blinded me." The car behind swung through the curve, following, and the lights hit the mirror again. "Coming up damn fast," he commented, getting worried. "Too damn fast for this road in this weather."

Adele twisted in the seat and looked back. "That's him!" she exclaimed, terrified. "That's the car!"

Carson put his foot down and the Lincoln leapt forward. It did look

like it, he silently agreed, the same six driving lights on a car the size of a pre-war Ford. He wrenched the mirror sideways to avoid the blinding reflection and immediately had to grab the steering wheel with both hands as his car picked up speed like a falling stone. He heard the engine behind roar as the Ford came charging up to his rear bumper and then into it. "Damn!" he cursed at the jolt. The impact swerved his right rear fender into a boulder as he swung into a left-hand curve. "Good thing this car's built like a tank," he said, to reassure Adele. She smiled weakly but he was of course watching the road. The Ford came up and hit the bumper again but they were on a short straightaway so it had no effect. As the following car recoiled Carson hit his brakes. "Hold on," he ordered. Adele faced forward and braced her arms against the dashboard. With a bang the Ford smashed into them. He floored the accelerator again and wrestled the Lincoln into the upcoming right-hander. A loud screech from behind combined with the squeal of his own car's tires on the wet asphalt. He glimpsed the assailant's vehicle swinging wide, into the left lane, and then bouncing off the guardrail and touching his left running-board. He glanced over his left shoulder and saw a smear of blood on the other, cracked windshield. For a second they ran side by side, much too fast, then the Ford veered, smashed into and through the rail, and disappeared off the road. "He's gone," said Adele. "Thank God!" she added.

Carson braked the car to a stop. "You're not going back!" she said, wide-eyed with fear. He considered it a moment. "No," he slowly answered, "I'm not going back. Last time I saw him he had a gun, if it's the same guy. We're going down to Beverly Hills and report a traffic accident." They did.

There was nobody on the back streets to give directions but once they reached Rodeo Drive the police station was visible halfway down, glowing in fluorescent light. As Carson parked in front of the low, white stucco, Art Deco building, comfortable with the promise of law and safety, a pair of uniformed officers sauntering out the door stopped to look at the crumpled Lincoln. One gave a whistle. "You OK, buddy?" the other called out.

"Think so," Carson replied, his throat suddenly dry. "I have to take the lady home," he continued. Somehow he failed to open the driver's-side door. Adele lay back on the seat, her eyes shut and her face drawn in reaction.

One patrolman looked in the car window. "Get 'em out," he told the other, not unkindly. At that the lawyer managed to open the door and get out but had to stop and lean against the roof of the car. "You had anything to drink?" the second officer asked him. "Hold off on that," the first interrupted. "Go in and get the matron." He did.

"Just take it easy," the remaining patrolman said, soothingly. "We've got all night." The police matron appeared. "C'mon, dearie," she said to Adele and helped her out of the car. They walked a few paces up and down the sidewalk. Carson roused himself and joined them. Adele shook her head and said, "Let's get inside out of this rain." They went in the station.

An older man in a houndstooth sports jacket met them at the door and inspected their eyes. "They look OK, Doc?" the Duty Sergeant, standing at the booking desk, asked him. He nodded. "No concussion. The young lady has a bruise, but it'll heal. Nothing broken." He sat down with them on the oak bench opposite the raised desk. "OK, Bud, tell me what happened," the Sergeant told Carson.

"We were coming down from the Crowncrest Tavern," he related, "and a car came up behind us. Tried to push us off the road. Slammed into us pretty hard once, but started wobbling around and went through the guardrail."

"So there's somebody crashed up there," the Sergeant concluded. The patrolman said, "We'll go take a look," and left with his partner. "Any reason this guy should try to kill you?" the Sergeant continued.

"I was doing some work on a murder case and one of the suspects is still running around loose. Could be him," the lawyer explained.

"Murder case!" the Sergeant exclaimed. "You a detective?"

"A lawyer. Earl Carson."

"Oh, now I get it. Is this unofficial or is L.A. County involved? Or some other jurisdiction?"

"The County is. Lieutenant Trent, but he's not on duty now."

"Well, if his murder suspect is lying on the hillside up there I think he'll want to know anyway," the Sergeant observed. "You want to stick around until we find out," he declared, "but the young lady should be getting home if she feels well enough. If you're still a little woozy, Miss, Doc here can take you over to the hospital."

"No, I'm OK. I'll get a taxi," Adele said.

Carson started to protest but the Sergeant waved his hand. "We'll have Doc drive you home. He's getting paid anyway and we want to make sure you're in good shape." The doctor got up. "I'll pull around front," he said, "and you bring her out, Cindy," he instructed the matron, and went down the corridor toward the back parking lot.

After they left Carson and the Sergeant waited in silence for the patrolmen's report. It came over the radio. Car Two reported they found the crash site and were going down to the wreck. Fifteen minutes later they called again and said the driver had been thrown out and was still breathing. The desk officer busied himself with sending out an ambulance and a wrecker. It occurred to Carson that they should have sent the ambulance earlier, but he really didn't care that much about M. Dessalines' welfare. If it was him, he cautioned himself.

"They'll be working on him at the hospital," the Sergeant said, scratching his chin. "No point in us going there to identify him, we couldn't get in. They're pretty fussy about it and we play along. You can identify this murder suspect, can't you?"

"Sure," Carson replied. "But I think Lieutenant Trent should have the first crack at it. It's his case over in County."

"That road is County, too. So it's his case entirely. You want to file a complaint now, though, so we can hold the guy in the hospital. Reckless driving will be good enough."

"Reckless driving!" the lawyer exclaimed. "Attempted murder is what it was. Assault with a deadly weapon, too!"

"OK, OK, you're the lawyer," the officer conceded. He dug a form out of the desk drawer and handed it to Carson. "You know how to fill this out?"

"Sure," he answered, and set to writing. When he finished the Sergeant had the Matron come in and sign it as witness. "Guess that's it," he concluded. "It'll be a couple of days before Prentice gets his report in. I'll shoot it over to County then. Anything else?"

"Was the other car a thirty-six Ford with a lot of chrome gadgets?"

"Don't know. Want to wait for the wrecker? I can have it drive by here," the Sergeant offered.

"No, it's not important. I don't think there are two wrecks up there tonight."

"I'll have Prentice drive up to the Crowncrest, just to make sure," the Sergeant said. "He can drive you home when he gets back. That'll be another hour at least. The Red Cars don't go through Beverly Hills, as you maybe know already, but you can call for a taxi. We can't have you driving your Lincoln in that condition. By the way, what do we do with the wreck? Take it to the impound or do you have a garage arrangement?"

"I don't think they'll want it in my apartment garage. Just have your wrecker get it next, please. I'll call about it tomorrow," the lawyer said, looking out the window at the accordioned trunk of his car.

The Sergeant fished a business card out of his pocket and gave it to him. "Here's the number," he explained, "they give us a bunch of these to give out. They're pretty reasonable. About the only thing in this town that is."

"I've got no complaints so far," Carson responded. "Except having a lousy ending to a night that started off pretty good. Mind if I use that phone?" he asked. The Sergeant handed it across the desk and the lawyer called for a cab. Within five minutes the car horn sounded outside.

Carson thanked the officer for his courtesy and went out and home.

He called Adele as soon as he got back to his apartment. She answered sleepily. "Took a pill," she explained. Carson approved and told her not to worry about work tomorrow. She said she'd be there anyway and hung up. He sat in his leather recliner, thinking over the puzzle. Next thing he knew, the sun was pouring in the east window. He ran a wet cloth over his face, shaved, changed into an unwrinkled suit, and went out for breakfast.

XVII.

Rather than hang around his apartment, he went to his office early, just as the office workers were beginning to stream into the downtown district. That, however, left him in his office chair behind his desk, thinking. Eventually he took out the file on another pending case and started working on it.

Adele, Gertie, and the typist entered together at nine o'clock. He frowned to see Adele coming to work after last night's events but she rushed into his office and gave him a kiss. The phone immediately rang. "Lieutenant Trent," she announced, handing the receiver to him.

He grimaced. "Hello, Lieutenant." The officer's voice buzzed on the line.

"I don't see how it's funny," Carson replied.

"What!" he yelled. "Reckless driving!"

"Does he have a license?"

"What about his passport? You don't think he's a citizen, do you?"

"I don't give a damn what the Feds think."

"How can you ..."

"But ..."

"But ..."

"You're going to charge him with RECKLESS DRIVING?"

"Oh, and driving without a license. That'll teach him to try to kill people."

"I know he's in the hospital. His own fault. Doesn't mean you should feel sorry for him."

"Yeah, yeah, Selby and his butt-kissers."

"Yeah, I know you would. But you aren't, are you?"

The caller gave a long explanation, Carson grimacing and gesturing in disapproval. Occasionally he interjected "Yeah" or "Sure". When Trent finished, the lawyer said, "No, I don't like it one bit. But I don't see what I'm going to do about it."

"I'll come up with something. Tell Selby he's not home free yet."

"No, no, you know better. Don't tell him anything, what's the use."

"If you're going to forget all about the murder of Link Williams ..."

"How do you know if ..."

"What ..."

"Why don't you ..."

"Oh, forget it. Yeah, I'll let you know first. Bye," he grunted and hung up the phone.

Adele looked a question at him. "Reckless driving," Carson explained. "That's what they're going to charge our friend Frankie with. They don't want to find out who killed Link Williams so they're not going to let me question him about it in court. He'll take a plea. They're not even going to deport him. Might make the F.B.I. agents look bad. So they're going to leave him running around loose and I'll have to be looking back over my shoulder all the time once he gets out of the hospital. Sorry, Adele," he added, seeing her dismay at the news.

He stood and looked out the window. "I've half a mind to go shoot him myself. Or arrange a traffic accident." He shook his head. "But if /les revolutionnaires/ are out to get me that won't do any good. And I told Trent I wouldn't. And I am, after all, an officer of the court. Even if the Law isn't going to do anything." He turned and sat down again. "But there are people who will do something," he mused. "I'll just bet they will."

"Who?" asked Adele, hopefully.

"The Haitian Government. The people who sent the late Octave Hippolyte Christophe here to get Frankie. So he didn't succeed. If at first you don't succeed, you know what. Look up the Haitian Embassy, or Consulate, or whatever, will you please?" he requested.

She bustled out. After two minutes, she came back in, crestfallen. "There isn't one," she informed him.

"Right. They sent Christophe from New Orleans. There must be somebody there, somebody who is not quite content about him getting killed. See if we can get them on Long Distance."

She did. "On the phone," she announced five minutes later.

He picked it up. "Hello, is this the Haitian Consulate?"

"I have some information on the death of Octave Christophe."

This caused consternation at the other end. After a long pause he gave them his name and phone number, being careful to specify Los Angeles, California. He hung up.

"They'll call back," he told Adele, unnecessarily. "Meanwhile, we have to work up a case against Frankie. I think Mrs. Virginie Dessalines might have something to tell us. And now is the time to find out, with that dangerous bastard in the hospital."

"I'll try to get her on the phone," Adele volunteered.

After a while she said, "No answer," from the outer office.

"OK," Carson replied. "Get Phil down here. No, just ring him and tell him to see if he can get Virginie to come in and talk."

After another while she said: "He's coming here. Says he has to talk to you." The door opened. "Here he is," she announced as the detective walked into Carson's inner office.

"I've got some more stuff on that bug," he began.

"Forget the bug," Carson replied. "Somebody tried to kill me and Adele last night and I want to make sure he doesn't try it again."

"Who is this someone?" Phil asked, businesslike.

"Francois Dessalines. One of those Haitians you and the Feebies were going 'round with. Apparently you stirred him up."

"Nobody by that name figured in the investigation," the detective claimed. "That was Virginie's ex-husband back in Haiti but he didn't figure to be in Los Angeles. You say he is?"

"He sure as Hell is. Tried to run me off the road last night and is now in Beverly Hills Hospital. Which reminds me, first thing I want you to do is find out how long he's going to be there. Get a full report, a photo if you can." Hope he's rigged up to those traction weights, Carson thought. "Confirm the ex-husband business, with dates and locations."

"We got what we could back in August," Clark dissented. "They don't do a lot of paperwork in Haiti."

"Got a photo of him in his wedding suit?"

"No," Clark answered. "That would mean going around to the relatives. You want us to send a man out there and do that? I'm not sure I've got anybody who'd go."

"Interview Virginie Dessalines, or Williams, or whatever. Adele will give you her address. Try to make it look official, you know, have your op say he's a detective from downtown headquarters."

"Um, we'll have to make sure the real cops haven't got to her first. Bet they have."

"Now there's a thought. Does Frankie connect himself to Virginie? Lieutenant Trent didn't say so. He may not know, himself," Carson mused.

The phone buzzed. "Yes, Gertie," the lawyer answered. "Stanfield? Who is Stanfield?"

"Security chief at Hughes Aircraft," Phil Clark supplied. "Talked with him a few times earlier, when we were getting the run-around from the Feebies."

"Send him in," Carson said. After a few seconds the inner office door was opened by the gray-haired but obviously fit and hard security officer, who nodded to Clark and took the other chair in front of Carson's desk.

"Glad to see you," the lawyer greeted him. "Have anything new on this Haitian mess?"

Stanfield allowed himself a grin. "I hear you do. I had a look at your Lincoln in the impound. There's a lot to be said for driving a big, solid car."

"Guess I'll see it in the gossip columns next. You just curious or did Mr. Hughes send you?"

"It's hard to say just what Howard is up to, most of the time," he evaded, in a frank and open manner. "Thought I'd better keep up with the Link Williams story. And I hear about these things through the cops, at least people I know do and pass it on."

"So you don't have anything new, yourself? Just touching base?"

Stanfield gave Carson an appraising look. "I put in some work on the case back in August, when it looked like it might hold up the Hercules project. There's a lot that Phil, here, didn't turn up because he didn't have the resources. Now I don't want to get Mr. Hughes involved, of course, but I figure that it's in his interests to get this whole thing wrapped up, and also to keep you available as counsel, which is one thing he did tell me to keep an eye on. So I'll tell you the whole story if you like, and then I think we can get together on putting an end to it now that the Haitian gunman is off the streets for a while. Sound good?"

Phil Clark gave the lawyer a sceptical look. Nevertheless, Carson said, "Sounds good. Let's hear what you've got."



So the visitor gave his account of Williams and the Haitian exiles. Briefly, Virginie and Francois Dessalines had fled Haiti in 1938. With the money they had brought -- probably looted or embezzled, since Haitians didn't make that much by honest labor -- Francois had Virginie buy a small house in West L.A. while he kept under cover. When her visa ran out she arranged, purely as business, a marriage with Link Williams which gave her U.S. citizenship. After a few months Link went up to Bremerton to work on Catalinas and Francois went to New Orleans for political intriguing in the exile community there. Williams returned in 1942 for war work at Consolidated Vultee and they heard that Francois had been arrested and executed in Haiti. So they turned their marriage of convenience into a real one. Which Francois did not appreciate when he showed up, unexecuted, in late 1946. However, there was nothing he could do about it since he was in the U.S. illegally. The pot simmered until the Haitian Government got the cooperation of the F.B.I. in rounding up fugitives abroad. Octave Christophe was given the task of fingering Dessalines; since he didn't trust his staff in New Orleans he left for L.A. secretly. However, the hard cases Francois had been associating with lured Christophe to the High Life Club and murdered him. The F.B.I. agents who had been watching Link Williams under the impression he was the wanted Haitian exile learned their mistake when they tried to arrest him at Hughes Aircraft the next day. They then set to covering up their blunder by preventing any investigation of the murder. Link took the opportunity to disappear, with some help from Stanfield's men. He was now working on helicopters in Texas. Virginie was threatened by the murderers and also dropped out of sight with help from Stanfield. Against his advice, though, she came back to L.A. and evidently made a satisfactory arrangement with Francois Dessalines, who was engaged in the illicit traffic in "black dots", Army-surplus benzedrine tablets. Maybe the effect of the drug explained his assault on Carson the night before.

Stanfield leaned back and lit a cigarette. "How much of that did you and Phil figure out?" he smiled. "Honest, now!"

"Not much," Carson allowed. "Good to hear about Link being alive, though. Guess we have to thank Howard Hughes for that."

The security man nodded. "Howard is good to work for. If you can keep out of his way sometimes," he added.

"I don't like this murder going uninvestigated," Phil Clark said. "I'm surprised that Lieutenant Trent let them get away with it."

Carson gave Stanfield a questioning look.

"Well, they're not real concerned about a murder down on Central," Stanfield explained. "I'm just guessing about this but I think Trent got a talking-to from higher up and was just going through the motions. There's a problem with the Haitian community, too. How do you separate the illegals into criminals and non-criminals when they're all breaking

the immigration laws? Do you want to send them back to Haiti? It's a real shit-hole even without the crazies who are in charge there. Considering what Christophe was here for I'd be inclined to think he got what he deserved. I know, I know," he qualified as Carson began to protest, "We can't have people murdered in our town just because other people don't like their politics. But following that line gets you working for the Gestapo. It happened like that before the War. I saw it happen."

"That's why we have laws, Mister Stanfield," the lawyer said through clenched teeth. "That's why we have deportation hearings. You say your piece there, you don't go shooting people."

Stanfield waved his hand in deprecation. "You think the Feebies were going to arrange a deportation hearing? Not a chance in Hell. They were going to stick a needle in Francois, shoot him full of dope, and ship him back to New Orleans in the baggage car. From what Williams told us, he'd avoided one ambush already through pure dumb luck. That's when I knew I had to get to work on his case."

"Why? Didn't they lay off Williams when they knew he was the wrong guy?" Clark asked.

"No," Stanfield shook his head. "They knew the right guy had at least some friends who had guns and used them. So our G-men thought it would be easier and a lot safer to frame Williams somehow. When they kept trailing him instead of the real Haitians I knew what was up."

"You have a devious mind, Mr. Stanfield," the lawyer said, his anger slowly receding. "I suppose you have to," he added.

"Hey, I just know what goes on. Did you really think the F.B.I. agents were after the murderers?"

"No," Carson reluctantly conceded. "Or, rather, I thought they were just screwing around because they didn't know a damned thing. That explains the reckless driving charge, too, now that I think of it."

"Reckless driving?" Stanfield asked, incredulous. "That's what they're holding him for?"

Carson nodded Yes.

They sat, considering the information. Carson passed around the office cigarette case and they lit up. Exhaling a jet of smoke, he told Stanfield: "My idea about Frankie Dessalines was to get him sent back to Haiti. Maybe they'll administer some justice if J. Edgar's boys won't let it happen here. And if was done effectively it would get him out of my hair. And Virginie's, too, not that I'm real concerned about her."

"Yep, that's what I thought, myself," the security man agreed. "Problem is, getting them to do it. After Christophe's murder they're a little reluctant to come out and give it another try. I know, I've put it

up to them."

"He's an illegal," Clark suggested. "Why can't we get him deported?"

"Can't say I've ever heard of that happening in L.A.," the lawyer dissented. "Not since they stopped shipping Chinese back in the Thirties."

"You could try it," Stanfield agreed. "Not that I think it'll work. He has a little pull through his business connections."

"The pep pill business?" Clark asked, incredulously. "That kind of petty crook has pull downtown?"

"I can see how they would," Carson answered. "Informers, you know. The cops have their own little business going, getting the pill-pushers arrested and convicted and paroled, so do the Assistant D.A.'s and the shysters who specialize in that sort of thing. Could name some of them right now if I had to. They don't want their routine busted up by having the people shipped back to Haiti, or Mexico, or wherever. That would mean they'd have to get off their behinds and investigate some real crimes. And that would be irksome, tedious, and maybe even dangerous."

Stanfield didn't comment.

"No, Phil," the lawyer continued, "we're going to have to work the Haitian angle ourselves. Get them to come out here again, or ... " he trailed off, looking pensive.

"Or throw a scare into Frankie enough to make him disappear," Stanfield finished the thought.

Carson shook his head. "That might work, too," he allowed. "Not what I was thinking of, though. Tell you what," he told the security chief, "I'll look up a few things and get back to you. Would late this afternoon be OK?"

"OK," replied Stanfield, displeased. "I don't think we should get real fancy on this, though."

"Not at all," Carson agreed. "I will need your help, though. Glad you came in," he smiled, rising. Stanfield took the cue and, after shaking hands again, left the office.

Phil looked at the lawyer. "What is this not real fancy scheme you've just now come up with?" he asked.

Carson didn't reply for a moment. His expression was grim. "Ah, Phil," he finally said, "ask Adele to come in here, will you. As you're going back to your office, please."

"If you say so," he replied, hurt. He left the inner office. After

a short conversation outside the outer door shut and Adele entered.

"Is he gone?" Carson asked her.

"Yes, Boss," she said, wondering. "Does this mean another explosion you don't want him to hear?"

He relaxed his expression a bit. "It would have if he had stayed a while longer. Him and that security Nazi."

"Earl!" she exclaimed.

"All right, he's not a Nazi. But he comes across like one," the lawyer explained. "No, not exactly," he immediately reconsidered. "He has the ethics of one. Above the law, I mean. He works for Howard Hughes and Mister Hughes is so filthy rich he doesn't even have to buy the local politicians. So a murder doesn't concern him except as how it affects the production schedule at Hughes Aircraft. He did get Link out of town, I'll have to give him that. But not for the right reasons."

"So Link's OK?" she asked anxiously.

"Yep," he replied. "Working for Hughes in Texas. They spirited Virginie away too but she came back."

"I don't think his reasons are important, then, considering the results," she said.

He acted as if he had not heard her. "I hate those people," he said. "People who make plans and push people around and break the law. The law means something. If I didn't think so I wouldn't be a lawyer. There are plenty of shysters who plot and scheme like that but they don't last. It's like a store that always adds the bill up wrong or gives short weight as a set policy. Most of the customers don't know exactly what's going on but they know they get a better deal elsewhere. So they take their business elsewhere. The reason those county-courthouse sharpies are hanging around looking for whores to bail out is that they're just too slick. Nobody brings an honest lawsuit to them because they've got a dirty reputation. Sure, they get crooks off sometimes. That doesn't do them any good in the long run. And when they don't get them off they get it in the short run, too. I run an ethical law business and that's the reason I make good money instead of being down there scrabbling for ten-dollar fees."

"Which is why you get cases like Mrs. Wheeler's," Adele commented as he paused, "and is why you win them."

"Right," he continued. "I could name you ten or fifteen attorneys here in L.A. County who would have sold her out first thing. Got ten or twenty thousand for themselves and nothing for the client. Thing is, they wouldn't get another client for a long, long time. Assuming they could live with themselves meanwhile. Assuming that other people could."

Ethics is a part of character. I'm not an angel but I can see how I'm not a crook either. So that is why Stanfield and Hughes and the Feebies and the shysters make me sick. A man gets murdered down on Central Avenue. A visitor to our city, goddam it. An official of a foreign country on official business, even. So what do they do? The Feebies try to frame Link and Stanfield gets him away. That's all. The murderer is left running around L.A. so he can try to kill me. And you, too, Adele. That's the tough part. I can't have you being endangered because of my law work. Dammit, I wouldn't be if those goddamn cops would just do their jobs! Deport the guy, if nothing else. If trying to run somebody off a cliff isn't a crime in L.A. anymore. He's a goddam illegal, after all!" He struck the desktop with his clenched fist, once.

"Well, he's got friends," Adele cautiously suggested. "The Haitian revolutionaries and the pep-pill pushers. Maybe getting Francois Dessalines off your back wouldn't solve the problem after all."

"Why don't they run them all out of town, then," Carson grouched. "Send 'em back to Haiti or wherever the pill traffic comes from. If I didn't know better I'd think that's what Trent was doing, giving them enough rope to hang them up good and proper. But with all this political mess I don't think he's doing a damn thing."

"You could ask him," she said, hopefully.

He shook his head in disgust. "I'm though with the L.A. cops. On this case, at least. And where does that leave me, with my respect for the law? Getting out my six-shooter and calling Frankie down in the street one sunny day? Or thinking up some scheme with Stanfield?"

"He didn't impress me as a crook," Adele differed.

"Above the law, Adele, that's his crookedness. You don't see that much in this office but it's the true Nazi attitude. Leads to the true Nazi results, too. At least I can be sure he's riding for a fall. Him and Howard Hughes. Mister Howard Hughes," he added spitefully.

"I wouldn't be too hard on him," she commented. "You have to make allowances for his upbringing."

He was momentarily puzzled. "Oh, Howard Hughes. You're trying to distract me. Well, maybe I should be. My point is that I can't let Hughes' man, Stanfield, work some of his lawbreaking on my behalf because it's not ethical. Throwing a scare into somebody is assault, at least the law says it is. Threat of bodily harm."

"It wouldn't work, anyway," Adele said. "Frankie is crazy."

"Or hopped up, which amounts to the same thing," Carson agreed. "So Mr. Stanfield will have to shove his little plot where the sun don't shine just this once." His mood was lightening a little. "Hell, why don't I go talk to Frankie? He may be a real nice guy once you get

to know him. And he'll be pretty safe to deal with in that hospital bed. I bet he's pretty messed up from that car crash. He broke the windshield from inside with his skull. Saw his blood on it."

"You'd like to see him that way, wouldn't you?" she asked.

"Sure," Carson admitted. "Wouldn't you?"

She merely nodded. "I don't think I will, though. Give me a full description when you get back."

"Sure will," he said. He got his hat and coat and went out.

XVIII.

Francois Dessalines had been taken to L.A. County Hospital; Beverly Hills was closer but they didn't take charity cases. The Charge Nurse wouldn't let Carson in to see him. He wasn't family or counsel, not for the patient anyway. He had to agree she was right. A call to Adele at the office revealed that Dessalines didn't have an attorney of record and a Public Defender was assigned to his Reckless Driving case. She said she'd find out which one and call him back.

As he walked away from the pay phone he was suddenly shoved out of the way from behind. Whirling, he found a gurney being wheeled rapidly past him by four determined-looking men in Hospital coats and a less-concerned doctor following behind. On the stretcher lay Francois Dessalines. As he passed he suddenly moaned, loudly: "I love her! But I love her!" in French. Carson thoughtfully watched the procession as it went down the corridor and through swinging doors at the end. As the doors came to rest he read on them: Emergency Surgery. No Visitors. No Admittance. He took a seat outside the Nurses' Station to await the outcome. And Adele's call, too, he remembered.

Nothing happened for half an hour. The home-decoration magazines on the table failed to interest him. The pay phone rang and Adele told him the name of the Defender assigned to the case. He told her there were developments at the Hospital and asked her to stand by at the office and postpone lunch. She said she would of course. He rang off and went back to waiting. He absently pulled out a cigarette and the Charge Nurse informed him, severely, there was No Smoking except in the lobby. He put it back.

"Oh, oh. Here's a problem," announced a familiar voice from over his left shoulder. Lieutenant Trent made the comment as he walked in with the Beverly Hills officer Prentice, who nodded to the lawyer as he looked up. Trent wasn't joking, Carson realized. He tried to think up a wisecrack but failed. "Have a seat," instead, was all he could come up with.

The policemen remained standing. "Or don't have a seat," he continued. "Talk to the Nurse and she'll tell you I haven't been in to see him."

"See who?" Prentice countered.

Carson grimaced and didn't deign to answer. He looked up, though, as footsteps sounded on the linoleum and the surgeon who had been following the cart appeared.

"Didn't make it," the doctor announced. "Massive C.V.A. secondary to skull fracture. Blew out like a rotten innertube and nothing we could do about it."

"Thanks a lot, Doc," Trent commented, sarcastically. The surgeon looked at him, puzzled. "That all you need to hear, Earl?" the Lieutenant asked Carson.

"All I'm going to hear, apparently," the lawyer retorted. "What I could read in the papers tomorrow, Lieutenant. Or could I?"

He didn't reply. The surgeon was still puzzled. Prentice and the Charge Nurse didn't say anything. "Well, don't let me spoil your party," Carson continued and walked out. As he turned at the end of the corridor he looked back. The doctor and policemen were talking in whispers, heads together, and the Nurse was looking at him with grim disapproval. He resisted the temptation to give her a wink and made his way out of the building and back to his office.

"So what did he have to say?" Adele asked him, when he had taken his swivel chair and lit a cigarette.

"He said: 'I love her, but I love her!'" he reported.

She considered this a moment. "Virginie, I suppose. But what were you asking him do about her? How did her name come up?"

"It didn't," he replied. "He didn't even know I was there. Those were his last words as he was being wheeled into surgery. He didn't come out alive."

"Oh," she commented soberly. "Then we don't have to worry about him anymore."

"What about his buddies? The revolutionaries and the dope fiends?" asked Carson.

"We don't know that they're after you," she pointed out.

"True," he allowed. He drummed his fingers on the desk. "What about the Feebies?"

"What about them?" Adele retorted. "They thought Link was Frankie. Link is gone to Texas and Frankie gone for good. So what do they care?"

"You can never tell about those guys," Earl grouched. "But no sense in trying to. Wonder what Iggy Trent is going to say?"

"After letting the Christophe murderer get away? I don't think he'll say much of anything. To you, at least," she qualified. "And I wouldn't bug him about it if I were you."

"Yes, dear," he replied, in a meek, henpecked tone.

"And who do we send our bill too? Link Williams, care of General Delivery somewhere in Texas? Howard Hughes?"

"Damn," he said. "I still don't have a client."

"We were working for Hughes, for a while," she prompted.

"Not really," he said. "Joe Petralli came in and hired us to find out who was shadowing Williams. He said he was Link's agent, or words to that effect, and Link confirmed it by showing up here later. So he /is/ the client on that job. But he's not responsible for the Feebies and the Haitians and Frankie the pep-pill gunman, deceased. Make out a bill for, say, two hours work on the Williams business and I'll give it to Stanfield to forward to Link. I don't see how we get paid for anything else."

"Oh, well," sighed Adele. "I didn't really think I'd get to Beverly Hills, anyway. At least we're both safe and sound," she commented, and gave Earl a kiss on the cheek as she hopped off his desk and left the room.

After mulling it over a few minutes he rang the switchboard. "Gertie," he asked, "do we have a number for Virginie Dessalines, a.k.a. Virginie Christophe?"

"We got one out of the phone book, but I don't think she ever answered," Gertie replied, riffling pages. "Here she is on the log. Nope, no completed calls."

"Hmm," he commented. "Ring up Lieutenant Trent and ask him to get in touch with me, please," he continued. He heard the call go through and the desk man at Police Headquarters take the message. He thanked her and hung up the phone.

XIX.

The Lieutenant arranged to meet Carson for breakfast two days later at the Milestone. "I take it you've got something to tell me in private," the lawyer commented as they put their trays down at a small corner table.

"That ain't Shinola, Sherlock," replied the officer. "What is this stuff



on the toast?"

"Oleomargarine."

"Yuck," he said, scraping it off. "Where's the jelly?"

"In those little containers. You peel off the top."

They prepared their toast and started sipping their coffee. "Give," Carson said after a minute.

"These foreigners are a real pain in the ass," Trent started. "Not the ones from Europe so much but the real different ones. Used to be the Chinese that gave us trouble, with their tong wars and clans and everybody having ten thousand cousins in California. Now we've got all sorts of strange people, including the ones from Haiti. Especially the ones from Haiti," he said, looking directly at Carson, "these past few months."

As the lawyer said nothing, he continued. "I've had to read up on them and I've talked to a few people who've lived there. There's a lot about them you wouldn't expect. Like every group has a conjure-woman who runs the whole operation. Tells them what jobs to take, where to live, how much of their salary they can keep, everything."

"So there's a woman who's the Queen of Los Angeles? For the Haitians, at least?" Carson asked.

"Three or four of them," Trent replied. "Each voodoo congregation has one and as far as I can tell every Haitian belongs to one or other of these groups. And 'belongs' like the slaves in the South used to, eighty years ago. If you don't do what the conjure-woman tells you, you end up dead and pretty soon. They pretend it's because of her making spells and sticking pins into a doll -- you've heard of that cute idea?"

Carson nodded.

"But it looks like they arrange accidents or use poison. Or if they're in a hurry, a thirty-eight Smith & Wesson, like was used on Octave Hippolyte Christophe. I'll bet she didn't like that, though. They try to be real clever."

An uncomfortable idea struck the lawyer. "She," he repeated. "Is this conjure-woman perhaps named Virginie Dessalines?"

"You got it," grinned the policeman. "This whole business is her idea -- getting the Haitian Consul out here, getting him shot, getting you mixed up in it and sending one of her men to run you off the cliff on the way back from the Crowncrest. Bet she's burning conjure-papers with your name on them at this very minute."

Maybe I don't have to give her Frankie's dying message then, Carson thought, she'll know it already through magic. "You don't know that,"

he countered.

"I know it like I know anything else in police work," the Lieutenant claimed. "I know she arranged the Christophe murder and I know I can't prove it in a court of law. Not the first time that has happened in the City and County of Los Angeles, strange as it may seem."

"You're about half right," came a woman's voice. The two men turned in their chairs, then rose as Mme. Dessalines took one of the vacant seats at their table. Two black men stood watchfully behind her. She put her coffee on the table and sipped from the mug. "Pure coffee," she grimaced. "Curious that you can't get chicory in it here."

"So you're not working a hoodoo on me, not right now anyway," Carson asked her.

"I have to go through the ceremonies, you understand," she replied, in a confiding manner. "Your doll is up on my shelf with some bloody chicken feathers on it. I will tell you, though, if you feel piercing pains through your abdomen it's likely to be the food here, not me, that's responsible." She had a faintly sibilant accent.

"What do you have to say about the Christophe murder?" demanded Trent.

"Only that murder never outlaws, does it?" she replied. After a moment she added, "And that the practice of politics in my country gets many people killed." She turned to Carson. "Can we dismiss the mouchard?" she asked him.

"She wants to talk to me in private," he interpreted to Trent. The Lieutenant hesitated, but rose and took his tray to a table across the room. She smiled at him there.

"What did he say at the last?" she asked Carson, with sudden intensity.

"'I love her, but I love her!'" he quoted.

She sat back, contemplating. "He did, too," she said. "But he became impossible, with those pills he was taking. I thought several times I had brought him back to a useful and normal life, but no, he sought out his evil companions, ones I could not control. He had been tortured in Haiti. Perhaps they had used the -- " she searched for the English word and gave it up, shrugging her shoulders, " -- the traditional drug to remove the will. He acted like it at times." She looked over her peaked fingers, as if far away.

"So who sent him to kill me?" Carson insisted. "And for what reason?"

"Not I," she replied, looking straight into his eyes. "I have no desire to kill you."

That's very considerate of you, he thought, but refrained from voicing the sarcasm. "Who did?" he repeated.

"I don't think anybody did," she carefully answered. "I think it was his own idea. He considered his automobile as his manhood. He decorated it for the same reason that country folk wear bird's heads and wings on their virile members. Your coming to my house -- in your large, expensive car, remember -- made you seem a rival for my affections. So it was only natural that he should pit his automobile against yours."

"Natural?" he said, amazed. "I'd call it a bad case of Freudianism."

She laughed. "Natural for the poor man as he was, an addict of the black dots. And with his life in our primitive country as it had been. As I said, I could not control him as I do the others. If I could have, you would not have been attacked."

"Is there anyone else who has it in for me? Anyone you can't control, that is?"

"No, not to my knowledge. Of course, you have other affairs. But nobody among my people."

"How does Link Williams fit in all this?"

"Oh, Link," she smiled. "What a lovable man! Honest Abraham himself! I am sorry I had to bring him into it. But with both him and Francois being my husbands it was unavoidable. He is in Texas now, working for Mr. Hughes. I expect to visit him. He should not return to Los Angeles, though."

Not with a warrant out for him, he shouldn't, thought Carson, and being one of this woman's husbands might not be such a good idea. "I don't expect to hear from him, myself," he said, "but I'll give him that advice if he asks for it. But he's in the clear now, isn't he?"

"Yes. As you are, too. Anything else?" she asked as she rose to go. One of her bodyguards pulled out her chair, forestalling Carson in this polite act.

"One little thing," the lawyer added. "Who is, or was, really named Christophe, and who, Dessalines?"

She gave a silvery laugh. "I expect that did confuse you. My name is Dessalines. A famous one in the history of my country and my true family name. My late husband, Francois, took it as a nom-de-guerre, a political name, and grew accustomed to using it. But Christophe was his real one and that of his brother, the traitor." She smiled and left, her other bodyguard paying her bill at the cash register. A very winning manner, Carson assessed her, a Frenchwoman's grace and taste in makeup and attire and carriage. A statuesque figure. A conjure-woman who had all her people under control except a few drug addicts.

Trent sat down opposite him. "Any admissions?" he demanded.

Carson shook his head. "Only indirectly. She's the Queen Bee, all right. She says I'm in the clear and so is Williams."

"Williams. Right," said Trent, placing him after a moment. "Nothing about Christophe?"

"Nope. Except the dope peddlers were involved and you might get something from them. She doesn't have them under control."

"Sure," grimaced Trent. "Talk to the hop-heads."

"Speed addicts," Carson corrected. "But it was political, not business."

"Which leaves us just where we were," the Lieutenant commented. They pushed aside their trays and walked to the cash register. "Hell of a place, Los Angeles," Trent further observed as they paid.

The young lady behind the register looked worried at this. "Was anything wrong with your meal, sir?" she asked.

"No, no," Trent hastened to assure her. "Just the business we were talking about."

She brightened. "Take some matches," she said and offered them the wicker basket of them. They took a couple of books each, for politeness.

"Yep, Los Angeles is a hell of a place," agreed the lawyer, as proceeded to the curb where Trent's Dodge patrol car was double-parked. "Take that woman who kept her lover in the attic. Or the fag movie director and his teenage nympho starlet and her mother who is supposed to be dead but keeps looking out of the upstairs window at people. Or Asa Keyes. Or ... "

"OK, OK," Trent said, getting into the car and rolling down the window. "The white folks are pretty low-life, too. But this is the first voodoo queen I've run into."

"We had conjure-women in Georgia, now that I think about it," Carson replied. "They didn't run the show, however. Mostly old and skinny and about as friendly as rattlesnakes. You kept away from them if you knew what was good for you."

"Good advice here, too. Be seeing you."

"Be seeing you," he acknowledged as the policeman drove off. "Good advice, Counselor. Now if people would only let you follow it sometimes ... " he said to himself. He looked up at the red sun, framed between two lines of skyscrapers, and started walking back to his office.

.

use -- in your

large, expensive car, remember -- made you seem a rival for my affections. So it was only natural that he should pit his automobile against yours."

"Natural?" he said, amazed. "I'd call it a bad case of Freudianism."

She laughed. "Natural for the poor man as he was, an addict of the black dots. And with his life in our primitive country as it had been. As I said, I could not control him as I do the others. If I could have, you would not have been attacked."

"Is there anyone else who has it in for me? Anyone you can't control, that is?"

"No, not to my knowledge. Of course, you have other affairs. But nobody among my people."

"How does Link Williams fit in all this?"

"Oh, Link," she smiled. "What a lovable man! Honest Abraham himself! I am sorry I had to bring him into it. But with both him and Francois being my husbands it was unavoidable. He is in Texas now, working for Mr. Hughes. I expect to visit him. He should not return to Los Angeles, though."

Not with a warrant out for him, he shouldn't, thought Carson, and being one of this woman's husbands might not be such a good idea. "I don't expect to hear from him, myself," he said, "but I'll give him that advice if he asks for it. But he's in the clear now, isn't he?"

"Yes. As you are, too. Anything else?" she asked as she rose to go. One of her bodyguards pulled out her chair, forestalling Carson in this polite act.

"One little thing," the lawyer added. "Who is, or was, really named Christophe, and who, Dessalines?"

She gave a silvery laugh. "I expect that did confuse you. My name is Dessalines. A famous one in the history of my country and my true family name. My late husband, Francois, took it as a nom-de-guerre, a political name, and grew accustomed to using it. But Christophe was his real one and that of his brother, the traitor." She smiled and left, her other bodyguard paying her bill at the cash register. A very

winning manner, Carson assessed her, a Frenchwoman's grace and taste in makeup and attire and carriage. A statuesque figure. A conjure-woman who had all her people under control except a few drug addicts.

Trent sat down opposite him. "Any admissions?" he demanded.

Carson shook his head. "Only indirectly. She's the Queen Bee, all right. She says I'm in the clear and so is Williams."

"Williams. Right," said Trent, placing him after a moment. "Nothing about Christophe?"

"Nope. Except the dope peddlers were involved and you might get something from them. She doesn't have them under control."

"Sure," grimaced Trent. "Talk to the hop-heads."

"Speed addicts," Carson corrected. "But it was political, not business."

"Which leaves us just where we were," the Lieutenant commented. They pushed aside their trays and walked to the cash register. "Hell of a place, Los Angeles," Trent further observed as they paid.

The young lady behind the register looked worried at this. "Was anything wrong with your meal, sir?" she asked.

"No, no," Trent hastened to assure her. "Just the business we were

talking about."

She brightened. "Take some matches," she said and offered them the wicker basket of them. They took a couple of books each, for politeness.

"Yep, Los Angeles is a hell of a place," agreed the lawyer, as proceeded to the curb where Trent's Dodge patrol car was double-parked. "Take that woman who kept her lover in the attic. Or the fag movie director and his teenage nympho starlet and her mother who is supposed to be dead but keeps looking out of the upstairs window at people. Or Asa Keyes. Or ... "

"OK, OK," Trent said, getting into the car and rolling down the window.

"The white folks are pretty low-life, too. But this is the first voodoo queen I've run into."

"We had conjure-women in Georgia, now that I think about it," Carson replied.